ANNUAL ELECTRONICS ISSUE ▶ 600+ MODELS TESTED

DEC 12

AA BATTERIES THAT LAST PAGE 11

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This issue by the numbers

Best & worst scores

99 Kenmore induction cooktop

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What you'll save

$1,500	Buy a KitchenAid 36-inch dual-fuel **range** and save this much over a comparable GE Monogram.
$200	Get a set of Klipsch Image X10i **headphones** instead of a pair of Bowers & Wilkins to get similar performance and save this much.
$114	Try haggling when you buy a **TV** and save this much on average, as did our readers who successfully negotiated.

Coming in January

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Who we are

Consumer Reports is the world's largest independent consumer-product-testing organization. We also survey millions of consumers about their experiences with products and services. We're based in Yonkers, N.Y., and are a nonprofit organization.

What we do We buy all of the products we rate. **What we don't do** We don't accept paid advertising; we get our money mainly through subscriptions and donations. We don't accept free test samples from manufacturers. And we don't allow our name or content to be used for any promotional purposes.

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- To send a letter to the editor, go to *ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor.*
- For news tips and story ideas, go to *ConsumerReports.org/tips.*
- E-mail submissions for Selling It to *SellingIt@cro.consumer.org.*
- For subscription information, go to *ConsumerReports.org/magazine* or call 800-666-5261. See page 73 for more details.

Ratings We rate products using these symbols:
Excellent · Very good · Good · Fair · Poor

CR Best Buy Products with this icon offer the best combination of performance and price.

Recommended product Models with this designation perform well and stand out for reasons we note.

Recommended car These tested well, are reliable, and performed adequately if crash-tested or included in a federal rollover test.

Don't Buy We label products with this icon when we judge them to be safety risks or to have serious performance problems.

ON YOUR MIND

Smart travel advice

Carrying medications is always wise when traveling (Up Front, October 2012), but it's important to carry prescriptions in their original bottle. This provides immediate information, such as drug interaction, and you may get into trouble if you have narcotics and no proof of prescription.

—*Mary Jane Dickey-Crewe* *Arlington, VA*

How to save on energy

"Test Your Energy IQ" (October 2012) says that lowering your speed will reduce gas. But just as wasteful, if not more, is the lack of synchronized road signals. The single action that uses the most gas is accelerating from a total stop to speed. So misaligned signals waste more gas for most people than driving a constant 65 rather than 55.

—*Robert Leavitt* *Sun Valley, NV*

"Five Ways to Better Lighting" (October 2012) says look for at least 1,600 lumens for a 100-watt bulb, but none of the 100-watt CFLs listed reaches that. We are an aging population for whom brightness matters most. In your calculation of energy savings, you should recognize that people will need to replace 100-watt incandescent bulbs with two-lamp or three-lamp fixtures that will still not be bright enough.

—*Joel Samoff* *Palo Alto, CA*

You're right that none of the tested CFLs meet the recommended 1,600 lumens, though they were the brightest that were available during our testing. For many people the increase from 800 lumens to 1,200 or 1,400 lumens will be enough to make seeing easier. In the future we'll test 100-watt-equivalent LED bulbs that are claimed to produce more than 1,600 lumens.

In your report on generators in October, you note three models that run "indefinitely with natural gas." This is a huge advantage, especially for the elderly and disabled. Running out of gasoline, or having to pour it into a generator in the middle of a hurricane or snowstorm is no fun and is not safe. In an extended power outage, stored gasoline will run out sooner or later. Natural gas will not.

—*John Vig* *Colts Neck, NJ*

As we note, most portables use roughly 8 to 22 gallons of gasoline a day, compared with four to eight 20-pound tanks of propane for portable models. And buying and storing lots of fuel can be unwieldy.

SEND YOUR LETTERS TO
ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor.

Ask our experts

Q I have a light fixture for a 60-watt bulb. Using the new energy-saving spiral bulbs, does that mean nothing bigger than a 15-watt/60W equivalent? Or can I use a brighter energy-efficient bulb as long its wattage is below 60?

—*Eric Deweese* *Avila Beach, CA*

You can use any bulb that does not use more than 60 watts of power for your fixture, including a brighter energy-efficient bulb such as a 100-watt-equivalent CFL. Brightness is measured in lumens, not watts. Both a 60-watt incandescent and a 15-watt CFL will produce about 800 lumens of light.

Q Do I really need to replace the filter on my refrigerator every six months? Our public water supply is very good.

—*Clinton Blandford* *Sunset Hills, MO*

Check the owner's manual for a filter life expectancy in terms of time as well as gallons. If you're not using that quantity of water, you may be able to use it past its six-month life. Water flow is also a good indication of whether the filter needs to be replaced. If water flow is noticeably lower, it's time to change the filter. Following the manufacturer's guideline is your safest and best option.

Q My tires have tire pressure sensors. If I replace a damaged tire sensor with an ordinary valve stem, will the other three tires still work?

—*Victor Adamkowski* *Oldsmar, FL*

We don't recommend that. Doing so would have the tire pressure monitoring system go into alert mode to remind the driver that the system needs servicing. Under law, a tire service provider cannot defeat a tire pressure monitoring system and should be reluctant to swap out a sensor for a valve stem. We recommend having a new sensor installed.

HIGH-EFFICIENCY The LG WT4801C[W] is a CR Best Buy top-loader without a center post agitator.

Q What does the word "unconventional" designate in describing top-loader washing machines?

—*Vincent Wolfinger* *Damascus, MD*

Conventional top-loading washers have a center post agitator; "unconventional," often called high-efficiency, washers do not. They use various methods to circulate the clothing inside the drum. They are generally more water-efficient than conventional top-loaders because they don't need the entire tub filled with water when washing.

SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO
ConsumerReports.org/askourexperts.

This page highlights efforts of Consumers Union, the policy and action arm of Consumer Reports, to improve the marketplace.

WHERE WE STAND

THE ISSUE Rental-car companies aren't required to pull recalled cars from their fleets.

OUR TAKE When you rent a car, you expect it to be ready for the road. No car that has been recalled for a safety problem should be turned over to a customer until it's safe to drive.

Yet some rental car companies have been slow to respond to recall notices. The problem came to a head when two California sisters died in a rental car that caught fire and crashed a month after a recall was issued for a leak that could lead to an engine fire.

Consumers Union and others have pressed the government to require rental car companies to fix vehicles recalled for safety

defects before handing the keys to a customer. Bills are now in Congress to remedy the problem. Some rental companies initially resisted regulation, but most now support the effort. We strongly urge lawmakers to take action soon.

1.7 million

That's the number of adults in the U.S. living in households with no checking, savings, or other account at an insured bank. About a third of the "unbanked" don't believe they have enough money for an account, according to a survey by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. Consumer Reports encourages people to look into smaller community banks or credit unions, which offer a safe place to keep money at little to no cost.

ON THE RECORD

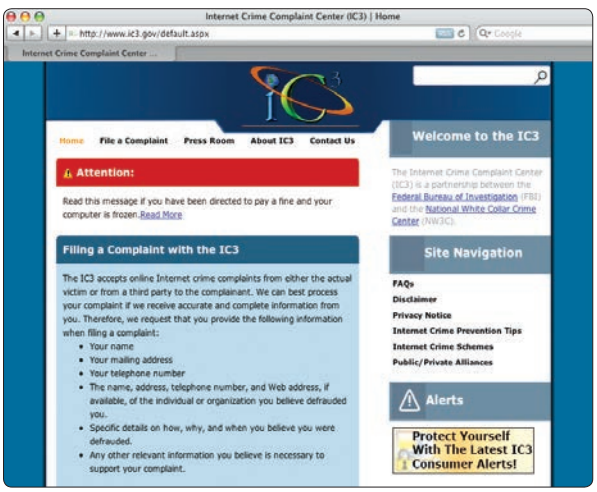
'The term means whatever a particular company wants it to mean.'

—THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION'S *explanation of "hypoallergenic." There are no federal standards or definitions that govern the use of the term, says the agency, which regulates cosmetics. It notes that the word has market value but that dermatologists say it has very little meaning. Consumers Union believes that vague terms with no standards or verification should not be allowed in the market, and we've publicly voiced concerns about that one.*

Web watch

E-mail scams are getting more sophisticated and harder to spot. To help protect you, the FBI and the National White Collar Crime Center have created the Internet Crime Complaint Center. You can find tips and file complaints at *www.IC3.gov.*

The State Department is also cracking down on international scams, such as questionable Internet dating offers and those familiar e-mails from "foreign princes" who claim to want to wire money to you. Go to *travel.state.gov* and look for "International Financial Scams."



FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Cause and effect

Everyone likes a compliment, and we loved a recent one praising Consumers Union's "street cred" and its "popular and trusted Consumer Reports magazine and untarnished image" (Supermarket News blog) following our report on antibiotics in meat. Here are a few more ways we helped make things better for consumers in 2012:

Arsenic. A Consumer Reports investigation published this fall found troubling levels of arsenic in many of the 60-plus rice products we tested. No federal limit exists for arsenic in most foods; we believe one should be set for rice. The Food and Drug Administration acknowledged concern and said it will do a risk assessment when its own testing is completed.

Days after our report was made public, three members of Congress introduced a bill to limit the amount of arsenic permitted in rice and rice-based products, crediting Consumer Reports for prompting the move.

Health insurance. The 170 million people who buy private health insurance will find it easier to compare and understand their options, thanks in part to significant input from Consumers Union's experts during the development of new disclosure forms.

The "Summary of Benefits and Coverage" will, for the first time, lay out the details of all private health insurance plans in a standard format, much like a nutrition label does on food. Insurance companies will be required to present specifics to their customers in a clear, readable way.

Strollers. Our tests of the Bumbleride Indie and Indie Twin strollers showed that an adjustable bar left in the wrong position could pose a risk of strangulation for an unharnessed child if he or she slipped under it. The Consumer Product Safety Commission issued a "consumer alert" and announced a recall based on a different problem: The front wheel could break and tip the stroller over.

The manufacturer maintained that when used correctly, the multi-use bar was safe, but it removed the bars from the strollers because "we can understand there could be confusion" about their safe use. Newer versions of the stroller don't come with that bar.

Jim Guest

JIM GUEST
President

PHOTO (TOP LEFT): JOE JOHNSTON/THE TRIBUNE

Up front

Tips, trends, everyday products

ILLUSTRATIONS: CHRISTOPH HITZ

Tipping tips for tight times

AMERICANS' BIGGEST TIPS last holiday season, a median of $50, went to housecleaners, who also were the most often tipped of the service providers covered in our nationally representative survey. Sixty-four percent of Americans who used housecleaners gave them money or a gift. Least likely to be tipped: garbage collectors.

We looked at the numbers since we began this survey, when we asked about the 2005 holiday season, and found a decline in tipping in several categories in 2008, most likely due to the onset of the economic crisis. Overall, however, there has been little change year to year in the percentage of Americans who have tipped the various service providers.

Slightly more than half of respondents didn't tip at least one of the providers whose services they used, and 39 percent didn't tip any of those on our list. Some non-tippers said they reward only exceptional service, and about one-fourth said they don't tip at any time, period.

Be sure to check the gift-giving policy at a child's school before giving teachers a present. And be aware that the U.S. Postal Service restricts the gifts that mail carriers can accept. Presents worth up to $20 are fine, but carriers can't accept cash.

The top reason that survey respondents skipped tipping: a tight budget. But as Daniel Post Senning, great-great-grandson of etiquette maven Emily Post, says, money isn't everything. "We like to say that holiday tipping is really holiday thanking," he points out. "Words mean a lot, so you can say something even if you're not a crafty person or a baking person. A genuine and thoughtful thank-you goes a long way."

Service	What people gave			Total value (median)
	Cash, check, gift card	Gift	Nothing	
Housecleaner	53%	15%	36%	$50
Lawn-care crew	21	4	75	25
Garbage collector	7	3	90	20
Teacher	16	35	53	20
Hairdresser	38	9	54	20
Manicurist	35	4	61	20
Newspaper carrier	32	3	65	20
Pet-care provider	29	5	66	20
Mail carrier	13	8	79	20
Barber	35	4	61	10

Conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center in January 2012 about the December 2011 holiday season.
Note: Some respondents gave cash and a gift.

CLOSE-UP

If you're thinking of thanking someone over the holidays by donating to a charity, check it out with the major charity watchdogs: the American Institute of Philanthropy (*charitywatch.org*), the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance (*give.org*), and the Charity Navigator (*charitynavigator.org*).

PHOTO: JAMES WORRELL; FOOD STYLING: BRIAN PRESTON-CAMPBELL; PROP STYLING: MIAKO KATOH

Best heat-and-eat appetizers

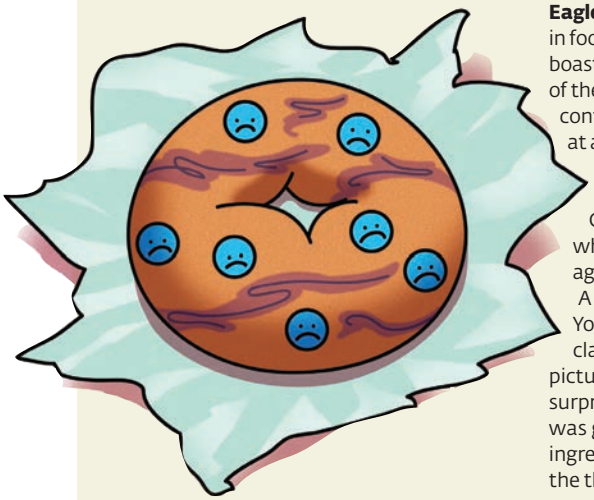
WARM HORS D'OEUVRES seem like an upgrade from the usual cheese and crackers, but are products from a supermarket freezer case worth serving your guests? Yes, if you choose right.

Our trained tasters tried six spanakopites (aka spinach pies or triangles), six mozzarella sticks, and six mini tacos or taquitos (their tortilla is rolled like a cigar). Half of the 18—all six spanakopites plus one mozzarella stick and two mini tacos—are very good. The rest are just decent.

When it comes to nutrition, all earned a score of Good, based on calories per gram of food, fats, sodium, sugars, iron, calcium, and fiber. Per piece, however, their nutrition numbers differ. For example, sodium ranges from 55 milligrams to 255 milligrams per piece. As a group, the mozzarella sticks tend to have more calories, fat, and sodium than the other types. Sizes range from about ½ to 1 ounce per piece for the spanakopites and mozzarella sticks and ¾ to 1½ ounces for the tacos and taquitos. The cheapest products per piece tend to be in the biggest packages.

Spanakopites. Most of these Greek snacks have fresh-tasting spinach that blends well with feta cheese in browned, crispy phyllo. The best of all, Cuisine

Fruit fiction: Is it blueberry or blue dye?



Eagle-eyed readers are noticing a hot trend in food labeling: Products whose packages boast "blueberry" and even feature images of the antioxidant-rich superfruit but in fact contain no blueberry (and sometimes no fruit at all). "There's a plethora of fake fruit claims out there," says Stephen Gardner, director of litigation for the consumer watchdog Center for Science in the Public Interest, which has taken action several times against what Gardner calls Frankenfruit.

A package of Welch's Blueberry Fruit 'n Yogurt Snacks, for example, features the claim "made with real fruit" alongside a picture of fresh blueberries. "Imagine my surprise when I realized the main ingredient was grapes!" a reader wrote. (The first ingredient: "fruit puree," of which blueberry is the third component by weight; the first two are grape and apple.) "We use the name and image of blueberries on the package because blueberry is the characterizing fruit flavor," said a spokesman for The Promotion In Motion Companies, licensee of these snacks.

Other readers wrote us about Blueberry Craisins, whose package pictures fresh blueberries and cranberries. The label says "blueberry," but that word is followed by a much smaller qualifier: "juice infused." So the product is a version of Craisins' usual dried cranberries, with no actual blueberries. Blueberry juice concentrate is fourth on the ingredients list.

The ingredients in blueberry bagels sold at Target include "blueberry bits," which aren't bits of blueberry but rather blobs of sugar, partially hydrogenated oil, and blue food dye. Natural and artificial blueberry flavoring show up later

Adventures spanakopita (Costco) and The Fillo Factory, cost about one-fifth as much as Dufour per piece. Cuisine Adventures tastes freshly prepared; Athens has a hint of dill; Trader Joe's has more feta than most and tastes a bit saltier.

Mozzarella sticks. Farm Rich are big, made of cheese with just the right amount of stretch, and have a lightly seasoned, browned, crispy coating. They cost just 27 cents each. Drawbacks in the other five products include dehydrated seasonings, uneven texture, and off-tastes. Appetitos sticks, for example, have an overused-oil flavor; Alexia sticks have slightly rubbery cheese; T.G.I. Friday's sticks had more breading than cheese after most of the cheese leaked out. Appetitos, T.G.I. Friday's, and Nice come with dipping sauces, which didn't help their flavor.

Mini tacos and taquitos. Don Miguel and Trader Joe's combine tasty chicken and flavorful, spicy sauce in a tasty corn tortilla. Trader Joe's sauce has less of a kick and has a tomatillo flavor. Those two cost less than the rest per piece but are also about half the size of most. Lowest-rated Delimex has a tasty corn tortilla, but that's about it. The filling's ground chicken reminded testers of chicken liver.

Bottom line. Eat your spinach. The spanakopita appetizers are the tastiest and have 75 calories or fewer per piece. Pop a few appetizers, though, and the calories, fat, and sodium can reach dinner-size levels. Eating a light snack before a party might stop you from overdoing it and ending up with hors d'oeuvre remorse.

Cuisine Adventures

The Fillo Factory

Farm Rich

Don Miguel

Ratings

In order of taste.

Product	Package size (oz.)	Per piece: Cost	Calories	Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)
SPANAKOPITES					
VERY GOOD					
Cuisine Adventures (Costco)	48	$0.29	75	4.5	135
The Fillo Factory	32	0.25	45	2	55
365 Everyday Value (Whole Foods)	12	0.54	55	2.5	130
Athens	12	0.49	65	3	135
Dufour	6.3	1.25	35	1	55
Trader Joe's	12	0.33	57	2	120
MOZZARELLA STICKS					
VERY GOOD					
Farm Rich	26	0.27	90	5	210
GOOD					
Appetitos with Marinara Sauce (Aldi) [1]	11	0.36	100	6	250
Alexia Stix	8	0.48	60	3	115
T.G.I. Friday's with Marinara Sauce [1]	11	0.61	100	5	190
Nice with Marinara Sauce (Walgreens) [1]	10	0.33	73	4	183
Giorgio	8	0.34	55	3	135
MINI TACOS AND TAQUITOS (chicken or chicken and cheese)					
VERY GOOD					
Don Miguel Mini Tacos	50.4	0.14	45	2	90
Trader Joe's Mini Tacos	17.5	0.18	48	2	63
GOOD					
José Olé Taquitos [2]	22.5	0.48	115	5	255
T.G.I. Friday's Quesadilla Rolls [2]	25.5	0.73	115	5	180
El Monterey Taquitos [2]	24	0.44	115	6	150
Delimex Chicken in Corn Taquitos	25	0.21	74	3	96

[1] Comes with sauce. Nutrition is for mozzarella stick only. [2] Flour tortilla.

in the ingredients list; real blueberries, even later. And Betty Crocker's Blueberry Muffin Mix? Hard-to-read print says, "Imitation blueberries, artificially flavored."

The trend extends to other popular fruits. A reader in Cummaquid, Mass., who was "really hungry and in a hurry" bought packs of Quaker Multigrain Fiber Crisps Blackberry Pomegranate, showing a cut-open pomegranate bursting with seeds next to two blackberries. Only later did he notice the tiny type stating, "Does not contain fruit."

Bottom line. Don't think you can get an out-of-season fruit fix from products that show fruit on the label. Read ingredients lists. The message, says nutritionist Bonnie Taub-Dix, "is to include more blueberries in your diet, not to look for products that have a hint of blueberry or maybe none at all."

CLAIM CHECK

Campbell's so-so soups

The claim. Campbell's makes its Slow Kettle Style soups sound like something special. On the label: "Everything good takes time. Like slow-cooked soups with high quality ingredients and delicious flavor combinations that deliver an experience you will want to slow down and savor." And the flavors sound pretty fancy: Portobello Mushroom & Madeira Bisque, Burgundy Beef Stew, Tomato & Sweet Basil Bisque, Tuscan-Style Chicken & White Bean, and Southwest-Style Chicken Chili. The suggested retail price for a 15.5-ounce container is $3.99.

The check. In a blind test, four staffers tried each of the five soups. We heated them on a stove, suggested "for best results," though you can microwave instead.

Bottom line. You say bisque, we say *blech*. Most of the soups were mediocre and tasted highly processed. Portobello Mushroom was a little better than most, though its mushrooms were rubbery; Burgundy Beef Stew was a bit worse, with some bitter and burnt notes. Meat, in soups that had it, was dry, stringy, or almost flavorless. A cup of each soup has about one-third of the recommended maximum daily intake of sodium. The bisques have the most calories and fat: A cup averages 245 calories and 16 grams of fat. And each container holds about 2 cups, so you'll need to find someone to share it with.

The buzz on energy-drink caffeine

THEY'RE EVERYWHERE: beverages that promise to keep you energized, revved, and alert. But labels don't have to reveal how much caffeine the products pack. We will. We measured the amount in 27 top-selling energy drinks and shots.

We bought the drinks online or at stores in Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York, and tested three lots of each product, choosing one flavor (usually fruit). We also sent shoppers to stores around the U.S. to see where energy drinks are displayed.

What we found. Caffeine levels per serving ranged from about 6 milligrams to 242 milligrams per serving—and some containers have more than one serving. The highest level was in 5-hour Energy Extra Strength; the lowest in the seemingly oxymoronic 5-hour Energy Decaf. (The company says it's for people who want to limit caffeine but still get a blend of nutrients that provides "an energy boost and a sustained feeling of alertness.") By comparison, an 8-ounce cup of coffee has roughly 100 milligrams; a 16-ounce Starbucks Grande, 330 milligrams.

Five of the 16 products that list a specific amount of caffeine—Arizona Energy, Clif Shot Turbo Energy Gel, Nestlé Jamba, Sambazon Organic Amazon Energy, and Venom Energy—had more than 20 percent above their labeled amount on average in the samples we tested. On the other hand, one of our three samples of Archer Farms Energy Drink Juice Infused had caffeine about 70 percent below the labeled amount. For the other drinks that list caffeine levels, the actual numbers were within 20 percent of claimed, which we think is an acceptable range for meeting caffeine claims.

Eleven of the 27 drinks don't specify the amount of caffeine. Why the secrecy? Their blends may be proprietary. (Common blends include amino acids, carbohydrates, or guarana, a botanical caffeine source.) A representative of the Monster Beverage Corporation provided another reason: The company doesn't list levels "because there is no legal or commercial business requirement to do so, and also because our products are completely safe, and the actual numbers are not meaningful to most consumers." Yet labels on both tested Monster drinks—like those of 16 other products—warn against use by children, pregnant or nursing women, and people sensitive to caffeine. The Monster drinks and eight others also recommend a daily limit.

Consumer and scientific groups have for years urged the Food and Drug Administration to make companies disclose caffeine levels, but the agency says it lacks the authority.

Our shoppers usually found energy drinks near soda and juice, sometimes at checkout, and less often near alcoholic beverages. That's good, since the potential for intoxication in people who mix energy drinks and alcohol is a concern.

Bottom line. Caffeine can make you feel more alert, boost your mental and physical performance, and even elevate your mood. But it can also make you jittery, keep you from sleeping, cause rapid pulse or abnormal heart rhythms, and raise blood pressure.

Safe limits of caffeine consumption are still being studied, but data suggest that most healthy adults can safely consume up to 400 milligrams per day; pregnant women, up to 200 milligrams; and children, up to 45 to 85 milligrams depending on weight. An occasional energy drink is probably fine for most adults. Check the Ratings for caffeine levels and price. And note that some products cost less than half as much as others per serving.

Ratings

In order of caffeine content, lowest to highest. Ties are in alphabetical order.

Product	Per serving				
	Size (fl. oz.)	Cost	Calories	Sugars (g.)	Caffeine (mg.)
5-hour Energy Decaf	1.9	$2.00	4	0	6
FRS Healthy Energy	11.5	2.00	20	2	17
Archer Farms Energy Drink Juice Infused (Target)	12	1.80	80	19	55
Amp Energy	8	1.00	110	29	71
Bawls Guarana	10	2.00	120	32	71
Steaz Energy	8	1.33	90	23	72
Red Rain Energy Drink	8	.50	100	24	75
SK Street Kings 6 Hours of Energy	2.5	1.75	0	0	78
Rockstar Energy Drink Double Strength	8	1.00	140	31	80
Sambazon Organic Amazon Energy	8	1.17	90	21	81
Red Bull Energy Drink	8.4	1.75	110	27	83
Starbucks Doubleshot	15	2.50	210	26	88
Monster Energy	8	1.00	100	27	92
Xyience Xenergy	8	1.25	0	0	94
Nestlé Jamba	8.4	2.00	90	20	98
Venom Energy	8	1.00	120	27	110
Guru Energy Drink	8.4	2.50	100	25	118
Arizona Energy	8	1.00	100	26	129
Clif Shot Turbo Energy Gel	1.2*	1.00	110	12	133
Stacker 2 6-Hour Power	2	1.50	0	0	149
Full Throttle	8	2.50	220	58	210
Celsius Your Ultimate Fitness Partner	12	1.75	10	0	212
5-hour Energy	1.9	2.00	4	0	215
Monster X-presso	6.8	2.25	90	12	221
NOS High Performance Energy Drink	16	2.50	220	52	224
Rockstar Energy Shot	2.5	2.00	10	0	229
5-hour Energy Extra Strength	1.9	3.00	4	0	242

*Serving size is in gram weight, not volume.

DID YOU KNOW

A look into ads

The New York attorney general has launched an investigation into the marketing and advertising practices of energy-drink companies, says a person familiar with the probe. Living Essentials (maker of 5-hour Energy), Monster Beverage, and PepsiCo (maker of Amp) were subpoenaed for information in July, the source said. A spokeswoman for Living Essentials defended its practices and said it complied with federal law; Monster and PepsiCo declined to comment.

LONG-LASTING? See our Ratings for AAs that earned an A in camera and flashlight tests.

Ratings

In performance order.

Recommended

Excellent · Very good · Good · Fair · Poor

	Product	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Test results: Camera	Test results: Flashlight	Price per pair
	LITHIUM				
✔	**Energizer** Ultimate	94	Excellent	Excellent	$5.25
	Energizer Advanced	74	Very good	Excellent	5.20
	ALKALINE				
✔	**Duracell** Ultra Power	51	Fair	Very good	2.00
✔	**Duracell** Coppertop	49	Fair	Very good	2.00
✔	**Rayovac** Advanced High Energy	47	Fair	Very good	1.60
✔	**Panasonic** Evolta	46	Fair	Very good	3.00
	Rayovac Alkaline	43	Fair	Very good	1.50
	Kirkland Signature (Costco)	42	Fair	Good	0.50*
	Energizer Max	41	Fair	Good	2.00
	CVS Alkaline	40	Fair	Good	2.00
	Walgreens Supercell	38	Fair	Good	2.50
	Eveready Gold	32	Fair	Good	0.75

*Sold only in packs of 48.

Batteries that go the distance

In happy times (taking holiday photos) and sad (enduring winter storms), you want a battery you can trust. We hired a lab to run new, improved tests that mimic the main uses of AA batteries: to power digital cameras and flashlights. We tested 10 alkaline and two lithium batteries. Neither type is rechargeable. (In past tests, we've found that rechargeables of 2,350 milliamp-hours or more are best for often-used toys like game controllers.)

In cameras. This test mimics everyday use, zooming, flashing, shooting, and resting until batteries die. Energizer Ultimate lithium took 682 shots in our tough test; Eveready Gold alkaline, just 52.

In flashlights. This test involves the equivalent of turning on a flashlight for 4 minutes every hour for 8 hours, letting it sit for 16 hours, and repeating the cycle until batteries die. Battery life ranged from about 7.5 hours, for the Energizer Ultimate lithium, down to about 5.2, for the Eveready Gold alkaline. The best alkaline, Duracell Ultra Power, lasted about 6.7 hours.

Bottom line. Energizer Ultimate lithium lasted longest in both tests. Lithiums are good in high-drain devices like cameras. Alkalines have shorter lives but cost less, and some perform almost as well in low-drain devices like flashlights and remotes. Most alkalines have a shelf life of about seven years, but some claim up to 10 years. Energizer Ultimate lithium claims 15 years; Energizer Advanced, 10. For info about tossing or recycling batteries, go to *www.call2recycle.org* or *earth911.com*.

Simple Pleasures: Skinnier chocolate

Hershey's Simple Pleasures Milk Chocolate with Chocolate Crème has "30% less fat vs. the average of the leading milk chocolates," says Hershey's website, yet is "100% delicious!" Not according to our expert tasters, who declared it mediocre at best. It has low chocolate flavor and is chalky and gritty, with a fudgy, frosting-like center. And when we asked 47 staffers to do a blind tasting of Simple Pleasures and full-fat Hershey's Bliss Milk Chocolate with a Meltaway Center, 32 preferred Bliss.

Our experts also tried Nestle's Skinny Cow Dreamy Clusters Milk Chocolate, sold in "yummy portions" of 120 calories. The verdict: not so yummy. Skinny Cow is mainly sweet rather than chocolaty, and its caramel filling lacks the butter flavor you'd expect.

Bottom line. Eat a bit of better chocolate. Tasty boxed chocolates at good prices: Godiva Gold Ballotin 36-piece, Ferrero Collection Fine Assorted Confections, and See's Assorted Chocolates. If you need a reason to indulge, note that a recent analysis of research concluded that chocolate may have a small but significant effect in lowering blood pressure slightly in the short term.

Thick-skinned

Try an ax

CONSUMER REPORTS Facebook fan Debbie Key actually used a manual can opener, not hedge trimmers, to free this soap dispenser from its plastic clamshell and almost cut herself on the shards. **The company says** We suggest that you open the package by using scissors to carefully cut along the top and side of the blister packaging. Then separate both halves of the packaging to remove the product and usage directions.

Packaging gotchas

Mad at hard-to-open, shrinking, undersized, or overwrapped products?

YOU'D THINK THAT companies would get it right. They spend $130 billion a year on boxes, bags, and blister packs. You spend on packaging, too. According to Joe Angel, vice president and publisher of the trade publication Packaging World, packaging accounts for roughly 7 percent of a product's overall cost, and some of that gets passed along to consumers.

Yet illogical, misleading, and over-the-top packaging continues to annoy consumers, and we have the letters, e-mail, and photos to prove it. The gripes come in four basic types.

- Oysters, our term for hard-to-open products. Often, they're gadgets imprisoned in clear, tight-fitting plastic. That displays merchandise from all angles and discourages theft. But it also foils honest folks, who have tried razor blades, scissors, box cutters, and saws to free the contents they've bought. Other oysters: cereals in stiff bags that split and spew their contents when you pry them open and pills in blister packs that give you a headache even as you're trying to treat your ulcer.
- Black holes, or products surrounded by lots of air. Federal law is supposed to prevent excessive "slack fill," nonfunctional or empty space. But there are loopholes in the law if, for instance, the space limits breakage or discourages theft, or if the package does double-duty as a dispenser. One company we were about to criticize actually changed its packaging after buyers complained. Archway modified the tray design for its Original Windmill Cookies "to accommodate a more tightly packaged product," a spokesman told us.
- Downsized products, shrunken by companies unwilling just to raise the price. Downsizing can occur in sneaky ways, as when Huggies reduced the number of Pull-Ups diapers from 72 to 70 but kept the words "New Larger" on the label. Companies usually blame downsizing on higher costs of ingredients, labor, and energy.
- Golden cocoons, tiny doodads shipped in giant cartons, sometimes with enough paper, bubble wrap, or airbags (called "void fill" in the packaging industry) to cradle a priceless vase. At least some companies are aware of the problem. (See "Frustration-Free Packaging May Prompt an Oath," on page 14.)

These pages showcase our latest examples of packaging faux pas, submitted by CONSUMER REPORTS' readers and Facebook fans. For each product, we asked a company rep to explain the packaging decision. Usually we received an answer, though not always to the question we asked. Read on.

Undersized

The package as prison

If elected, she'll liberate dolls from ties that bind. Some toy makers are replacing twist ties, manacles, tabs, string, glue, and plastic strips with molded plastic notches, but Barbie, 53, continues to be held captive, though less so than we've seen in the past. Said Nancy Gratz on Facebook: "Kids lose interest by the time you get it out of the package!"
The company says No response.

Air to spare

Uncooked, the shells and sauce occupied little of the container. "Even after adding water and cooking in the microwave," said reader Ken Buckingham of Waynesville, Mo., "the portion seemed a little short."
The company says You have to add water, and the noodles expand. We don't want it to boil over.

Empty compartments

Not only could the bottle fit many more tablets but the box has extra partitions.
The company says We are looking at options that are less challenging to open. (That didn't answer our question, but companies with similar products have told us that they use the same box for periodic promotions such as buy one, get one free.)

Big box, little brownie

The Fiber One bar is about 2½ inches long; its wrapper, about 4½ inches. "No wonder it's only 90 calories," said reader Eric Snell of Ogden, Utah.
The company says We're sorry we cannot give you an exact answer, as we use different suppliers at different times. This has been forwarded to our quality department.

Be gentle

LEDs and compact fluorescents such as the Feit come in sealed blister packs. The plastic fits so tightly that you'll need a delicate touch to keep from cracking the bulbs and hurting yourself. As Tori Ash remarked on Facebook, "I love using scissors when a light has gone out."
The company says No response.

It's the pits

"Not only is the box half full, the bag is only half full," groused reader Richard Bond. In fact, Bond's estimate may have been too generous.
The company says We will evaluate the current product for improvements.

Downsized

Less pasta—and fiber

"I guess it was too Smart," says reader Susan Richardson of El Segundo, Calif. Not only were the contents trimmed by 2.5 ounces but the fiber was reduced, from 7 grams per serving to 5. Yet the new label proclaims "2.5x the fiber of regular pasta." If true, it's still not good news for people who liked the old fiber amount.
The company says We need to stay competitive. That way, retailers can put it on sale more often. And fiber was trimmed to make the pasta better tasting.

Bittersweet news

"What happened to the five-pound bag of sugar?" asks reader Barbara Boas of Silverdale, Wash.
The company says We offer retailers a 4-pound package to be competitive with many store brands (which already made the switch). The 5- and 10-pound sizes are still available, but the decision on what sizes to carry lies with the chain.

Lowering the bar

When reader Yves Veenstra, of Cherry Hill, N.J., bought a 10-pack of Ivory Soap recently, he felt a difference. "I got home and compared the new bars with one from a prior purchase. Surprise!" Each new Special Edition bar weighs 4 ounces; the old bar weighed 4.5.
The company says Higher manufacturing costs meant increasing bar cost or decreasing bar size.

Cutting coffee

The poster child of downsized products, coffee long ago shrank from its 1-pound can or brick. Maxwell House has chipped away at larger sizes, too: here, from 31.5 ounces to 28. Parent company Kraft boasts that the coffee has a New! Flavor Lock Pack. "Sure does," says reader Peter Barber of Enterprise, Ala. "It locks in 30 fewer cups."
The company says It was either reduce the size or raise the price. And the new pack uses less plastic.

'Frustration-free packaging' may be baffling

Amazon's frustration-free packaging program is meant to reduce wrapping for shipped products (better for the environment) and make them easy to open (better for you). But you can't assume that frustration-free packaging is always better, cheaper, or even different from the usual.

Some of Amazon's more than 100,000 frustration-free items have the same packaging whether bought from Amazon or elsewhere. The packaging simply meets the guidelines: It's easy to open, say, or recyclable. For other items, Amazon has worked with manufacturers to reduce packaging.

In online comments, some buyers have said that frustration-free packages didn't protect well enough. One said a computer hard drive was packed so loosely that it arrived damaged, and a replacement showed up in the same condition. An Amazon spokeswoman said frustration-free items have undergone transit tests to ensure they're properly packaged and that Amazon works with manufacturers and shippers to resolve any issues.

Less packaging doesn't necessarily mean a lower cost. We shopped for three items on Amazon.com, comparing prices for the frustration-free and traditional packaging. In each case, the product sold by Amazon in frustration-free packaging was pricier.

Bottom line. If you want to make sure wrapping is truly frustration-free, call Amazon before you order and ask exactly how the product's packaging differs.

ILLOGICAL The box says "Certified Frustration-Free Packaging," but the recipient was annoyed: "A padded envelope would have worked fine."

Less filling

Most people wouldn't have noticed what Mel Kallal of West Monroe, La., saw right away: Pinnacle Foods shaved an ounce off its roast turkey dinner with all the fixings—and changed the words on the label from "Over 1 lb. of food" to "1 lb. of food."
The company says With rising commodity costs, we chose to downsize rather than hike the price.

Shriveled raisins

Reader Pat Lehane, of Costa Mesa, Calif., didn't notice the difference between the new 6-pack and the one at home until she compared them. The new boxes were thinner and reduced from 1.5 ounces to 1 ounce, and the label's wording had changed from "100 calories or less per ounce" to "Less than 100 calories per box." Lehane says, "I felt duped."
The company says No response.

Shaving contents

Kathleen Kraemer, from Newton, Mass., saw that the old and new cans were identical in size. On the outside, that is. The contents had shrunk from 11 ounces to 10.
The company says (Our favorite response.) We are in no way trying to trick our customers. A slightly reduced product volume within our cans creates improved function from the very first shave, while continuing to deliver superior quality to the very last shave. Feedback also revealed that many consumers felt the longevity of our prior 11-ounce shave cream offering an average supply of four to six months was too long and often wasteful.

Overwrapped

Time to rewrap

"If you look closely, you will see a small plastic bag with two 13mm watchband pins," says reader John Dugan of Millville, Mass., who received this box from Amazon. "Hey, a number 10 envelope and a stamp costs less than sending this FedEx."
The company says We use a system that calculates the optimal box size based on the dimensions and weight of the item.

Breakable cloth?

Not taking any chances, Williams-Sonoma cradled its napkins with bubble wrap, placed them in a big carton, and shipped the order to readers Steve Fetter and Bonnie Kellogg in Nordland, Wash. Said Fetter: "When my wife opened the box, she never imagined all she would find inside were four cotton napkins."
The company says When customers share their comments with us, they are forwarded to the appropriate department for later review so that new ideas and programs can be implemented if necessary.

Resist the extended-warranty pitch

WHILE YOU'RE DOING your holiday shopping, be prepared for the inevitable pitch to add a service plan, or extended warranty, to your purchase, especially if you're buying electronics or appliances. Salespeople will tell you that a service plan gives you the peace of mind of knowing that any repairs needed after the manufacturer's warranty expires will be covered. What they won't tell you is that stores keep 50 percent or more of what they charge for plans—more than they can make selling actual products. They also won't tell you these reasons you almost never need one:

Products last a long time. Our reader surveys show that many consumer products are reliable, making a service contract unnecessary. If products don't break while the manufacturer's warranty is in effect, they probably won't during the service-plan period, particularly if you buy brands that we've judged to be especially reliable.

Contracts can be expensive. A service plan can increase an item's price by a third or more, and on average it costs not much less than what you'd pay for a typical repair. You can self-insure by putting the cost of contracts into a dedicated bank account for repairs and replacements. That way, even if you have to pay to repair or replace an item, you'll still probably be ahead overall. Also, our surveys show that repairs you pay for out-of-pocket might be handled more quickly and have a somewhat better chance of being done properly than repairs covered by service plans.

Coverage may come up short. Because of commissions or corporate pressure to sell warranties, salespeople might exaggerate the extent of the coverage or fail to point out the fine-print limitations. We found plenty of contract-related consumer complaints on online message boards. Some of those who tried making a claim reported having to wait on hold for long periods only to be told that there was no repair shop near them or no record of their contract. Some people reported waiting weeks for repairs or having claims denied because the damage was deemed to be their fault. And some said their plan began on the purchase date, covering much of the same period as the manufacturer's warranty.

Companies want satisfied customers. Even if the written, or "express," warranty or return period has expired, the manufacturer or retailer might help if you have a problem with a product. Companies often have customer goodwill programs that offer a repair, replacement, upgrade, or refund if your request is reasonable. If your first attempt to get help from the company doesn't work, try going higher up or posting your complaint on the company's website or social-media page.

Your credit card may cover it. Many credit cards automatically extend a manufacturer's warranty by up to a year when you use the card to pay for the entire purchase. Coverage varies by card, and there are limitations. For example, an item must come with a manufacturer's warranty to start with. So check your card's terms and conditions.

To use these programs, you typically must have copies of the written warranty and your receipt. If available, register the purchase with the credit-card warranty program. Visa's optional Warranty Manager Service, for example, lets you register and manage your warranties online.

You have other warranty rights. For most purchases, state law gives consumers the right to receive a product that does what it's supposed to do, is free of substantial defects, and lasts a reasonable amount of time. This so-called implied warranty of merchantability can expand your rights beyond any written warranty. Retailers in all but a handful of states are allowed to "disclaim" this protection by using terms like "as is" or "with all faults," though it's uncommon in walk-in stores. But those disclaimers are often in online retailers' fine print and in manufacturers' written warranties.

It may be an easy fix. Searching the Web using your model and a brief description of the problem may turn up advice on a quick, low-cost fix that you may be able to do yourself. In some cases, something you think is broken may only require a tweak or advice on its proper use.

Accidents happen

If you buy a laptop that will be carried around, a type of service plan that covers accidental damage might be worth considering. Dell offers stand-alone accidental damage coverage from $59 to $79 for two years, depending on the model. Sony offers a contract that doubles its basic one-year warranty for $100 to $200; two-year accidental damage protection can be added for $50 to $100.

Another option is to add coverage to your homeowners, renter's, or condo insurance policy. A scheduled personal-property endorsement (also known as a floater) can cover a single computer; a home-computer endorsement can cover all of your computers and peripherals. Liberty Mutual's home-computer endorsement is just $20 a year with a $50 deductible.

Before choosing any of those options, read the fine print so that you'll know exactly what is and isn't covered.

ILLUSTRATION: DAVID SENIOR

CLOSE-UP

How to make the season safer

1 Holiday lights. Only use lights tested by a nationally recognized laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Check each set for damage, and throw out any with broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Lights and extension cords that are used outside should be rated for outdoor use. Don't use more than three standard-sized sets of lights per single extension cord.

2 Ladders. Always face a ladder when you're climbing and descending. Don't climb beyond the highest step recommended, and don't reach more than 1 foot to the side. Use a stepladder only in its opened, A-shaped position, never when it's folded, and make sure the spreaders are locked. If you're using an extension ladder, make sure it extends 3 feet beyond the work surface. Read and follow all of the instructions for proper usage.

3 Christmas trees. A fresh one is less of a fire hazard than a dry one. Look for a tree that's green, with needles that are hard to pull from branches and don't break when bent between your fingers. The trunk end should be sticky with resin. Keep the tree away from any heat source, and remember that a heated room will dry it out quickly, so always keep the stand filled with water.

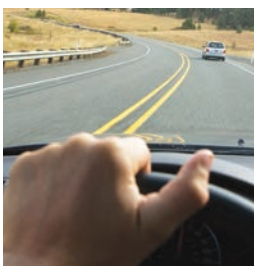
4 Wood-burning fireplaces. Inspect the chimney annually for cracks and obstructions such as bird nests. Have it cleaned professionally to remove blockages and creosote buildup. Don't burn wrapping paper in it; that could start a flash fire because the paper ignites suddenly and burns intensely.

5 Space heaters. Look for a safety-certification label from an independent testing organization, such as UL. Check the power cord for cracks, fraying, loose connections, and broken plugs, and repair or replace the heater if you find damage. Keep people, animals, and flammable items at least 3 feet away from it. Never leave the heater on while you're sleeping.

Lexus emergency trunk releases fail

Our auto testers found that the glow-in-the-dark emergency trunk releases in our 2013 Lexus ES and GS test cars can snap off when pulled. That could prevent a trapped person from opening the trunk lid and escaping. We have notified the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and Toyota, which owns Lexus. They are investigating. As with all cars, keep your car locked when it's unoccupied to prevent kids from climbing into the trunk.

Lexus GS 350



Driving on medication

The American Automobile Association (AAA) has introduced a tool called Roadwise Rx that helps you identify possible driving impairments from certain medications. You can find the self- assessment tool at *roadwiserx.com*. Roadwise Rx explains the driving-related effects of a wide range of prescription and over- the-counter drugs. It also provides a database with general information about specific medications or combinations of medications you might take.

BOTTOM LEFT PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES; ILLUSTRATION: BROWN BIRD DESIGN

RECALLS

AUTOMOBILES

'07-'09 Toyota

Toyota is recalling 12 models over a problem with a power-window switch, which could overheat and possibly cause a fire if commercially available lubricants are applied to resolve a sticking problem.

MODELS About 2.5 million vehicles: '07-'08 Yaris, '07-'09 Rav4, '07-'09 Tundra, '07-'09 Camry, '07-'09 Camry Hybrid, '08-'09 Scion xD, '08-'09 Scion xA, '08-'09 Sequoia, '08 Highlander, '08 Highlander Hybrid, '09 Corolla, and '09 Matrix.

WHAT TO DO Owners will be notified to bring in their vehicle for an inspection, switch disassembly, and application of special fluorine grease. Contact Toyota at *toyota.com/recall* or 800-331-4331 for more information.

'07-'10 Chevy/Pontiac/Saturn

Tabs on the transmission shift cable end may fracture and separate. If that happens, the shift lever and actual position of transmission gear may not match. You will be able to move the shifter to Park and remove the ignition key, but the gear won't actually be in Park. You may not be able to restart the car, and it could roll away after you get out.

MODELS 426,240 '08-'10 Chevrolet Malibu and Pontiac G6, and '07-'10 Saturn Aura vehicles with four-speed automatic transmission.

WHAT TO DO GM will notify owners, and dealers will install a retainer over the cable end or replace the shift cable, if necessary. Call GM at 800-521-7300 for details.

'03-'08 Honda Accord V6/ Acura TL

High temperatures under the hood and in power-steering fluid may cause the power-steering hose to deteriorate and leak. That could lead to a loss of power-steering assistance. If the leak contacts the catalytic converter, it poses risks of smoke or fire.

MODELS This recall expands a May 2012 recall and includes 572,000 '03-'07 Accord V6 in addition to the originally recalled '07-'08 Acura TL.

WHAT TO DO The updated power-steering hose needed for the repair of Accords won't be available until early 2013. Accord owners will be notified by mail of symptoms they may experience if there's a leak. If you think your car has those symptoms, take it to a Honda dealer for inspection. Call Honda at 800-999-1009 or go to *recalls.honda.com* for details.

5-MINUTE CONSULT

Our experts field your questions

FACE FACTS Companies don't have to prove that most "anti-aging" products do anything.

This month we're excited to introduce the new Consumer Reports Medical Advisory Board. This group of accomplished physicians will lend their expertise to our health coverage—reviewing articles, weighing in on recommendations, and collaborating with our in-house medical advisers. They'll help us give you the best, most up-to-date health advice, as well as answer questions like these.

Q How do I know if my anti-aging cream will really do anything?

You don't, in most cases. Unlike drugmakers, who have to get approval for their products from the Food and Drug Administration, cosmetics companies don't have to submit evidence that their products actually do anything before they reach the market. The only anti-wrinkle cream that's FDA approved is tretinoin (Renova, Retin-A, and generic), which requires a prescription. Most other anti-aging products are regulated as cosmetics, meaning that companies can claim pretty much anything as long as it falls under the umbrella of enhancing your appearance rather than altering the structure or function of your skin. Companies have good reason to keep their products on the cosmetics side of the fence: It costs upward of $80 million to get a new drug approved. The market for anti-aging products is so big that it's more lucrative for companies to focus their efforts on attracting consumers with packaging and claims. Now here's the rub: Just because something lacks FDA approval doesn't mean it won't work. But unless you can see the company's research, you might just have to try it to see whether it does anything.

—Jessica Krant, M.D., M.P.H.

Q What's the risk of not completing a course of antibiotics?

Stopping early might put you at risk for a relapse or prolong your infection. That's especially true for serious infections, such as tuberculosis or bone or joint infections. For milder infections, such as sinusitis or acute bronchitis, it's not always clear what the ideal length of antibiotic treatment is or how beneficial the drugs are. But because longer courses of antibiotics have been associated with an increased risk of antibiotic resistance, you should always ask for the shortest course necessary to do the job. And make sure that you're prescribed antibiotics solely for bacterial infections. Bronchitis that stems from a virus, for example, will not respond to antibiotics, and by taking them you risk experiencing side effects as well as encouraging the growth of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

—B. Joseph Guglielmo, Pharm.D.

Q My mother is 82 and has dementia. Her nursing home called to say that she isn't eating and that they want to put in a feeding tube. What should I do?

It's a difficult decision. Studies have shown that artificial nutrition, either by tube or intravenously, neither prolongs life nor improves the quality of life for people with advanced dementia. Feeding tubes also create risks, including infections, bowel problems, and the need to tie down the patient's hands in some cases to prevent him or her from dislodging the tubes. Because of those risks and the lack of a clear benefit, medical ethicists usually advise against artificial nourishment for patients like your mother. But doctors and families often have a hard time following that advice, perhaps because it's hard to accept that an intervention won't help or because they think that it's inhumane to withhold nourishment. If your mother doesn't have an advance directive that specifies her wishes and you don't feel sure as to what she would have wanted, ask for a consultation with the nursing home's ethics committee or palliative-care specialist. They should be able to provide some guidance.

—David S. Seres, M.D.

Q What's the difference between Evista (raloxifene) and other osteoporosis drugs, such as Fosamax (alendronate)?

They belong to different drug classes and protect the bones in different ways. Raloxifene is a selective estrogen receptor modulator, or SERM, a class of drugs that affects the way different parts of the body respond to the hormone estrogen. In the bones, raloxifene essentially acts as supplemental estrogen, increasing bone density and preventing bone loss. But it can also increase the risk of blood clots and strokes, so women who have a history of blood clots or who smoke, drink heavily, or have diabetes or heart disease should generally avoid it. Alendronate and similar drugs, such as ibandronate (Boniva), are bisphosphonates, which work by inhibiting enzymes involved in the breakdown of bone. For most postmenopausal women, lifestyle steps, such as taking calcium and vitamin D, exercising, and avoiding smoking and excessive alcohol consumption, should be the first line of defense against osteoporosis. Medication should generally be added only for those who have a history of fractures or are otherwise at high risk.

—James Woods, M.D.

Q My family doctor suggested an antidepressant for my depression. I don't want to take medication. Isn't there something else I can try?

Yes, especially if your depression is mild or moderate, or is related to a recent event. Evidence-based treatments for depression include both antidepressant medication and psychotherapy, specifically two forms called cognitive behavioral therapy and interpersonal therapy. For mild depression, there's good evidence that psychological treatment alone for 10 to 12 weeks can be beneficial. When depression is more severe and persistent—a real change from one's usual self, lasting more than two weeks—it might be necessary to consider a trial of medication for 10 to 12 weeks. That amount of time should give you and your doctor a good idea of how helpful drug treatment would be for you. If it's beneficial, expect to continue taking medication for at least 6 to 12 months, in most cases. Don't stop without talking with your doctor first, because

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

antidepressants should be discontinued gradually. In cases where depression is long-standing and has affected a person's functioning, adding psychological treatment to medication can offer additional improvement. *—John T. Walkup, M.D.*

Q Who should have CT screening for lung cancer?

The evidence suggests that there is a small group of people at very high risk for lung cancer who may benefit from annual CT screening for three years. It's a very specific group: those 55 to 74 years old who have smoked 30 pack years, which is calculated by multiplying the number of years they have smoked by the number of packs per day. (Former smokers who quit within the last 15 years are candidates, too.) If you fall into this group, it's worth discussing screening with your doctor. But there are risks, too, including that the CT might uncover something that won't harm you but might lead to more testing. If you don't meet the above criteria, then screening probably isn't for you. Even for people at very high risk, we must always balance the potential benefits of screening with the risks of radiation exposure or over-treatment that could result. If you do get screened, choose a hospital or clinic that has radiologists who specialize in reading CT scans of the chest and experienced lung physicians to interpret the findings. *—Peter B. Bach, M.D.*

ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

Peter B. Bach, M.D., attending physician and director, Center for Health Policy and Outcomes, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York City.

Anita Chandra-Puri, M.D., instructor of clinical pediatrics, Children's Memorial Hospital, Chicago.

B. Joseph Guglielmo, Pharm.D., professor and chairman, department of clinical pharmacy, School of Pharmacy, University of California, San Francisco.

Jessica Krant, M.D., M.P.H., board-certified dermatologist in New York City specializing in medical, cosmetic, and surgical dermatology.

David S. Seres, M.D., director, medical nutrition and nutrition support services, New York Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center, New York City.

John T. Walkup, M.D., vice chairman, department of psychiatry, and director, division of child and adolescent psychiatry, New York Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center, New York City.

James R. Woods, Jr., M.D., professor and chairman, department of obstetrics and gynecology, University of Rochester School of Medicine, New York.

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To lose weight, eat breakfast. Studies found that people who habitually eat the morning meal were four times *less* likely to be obese.

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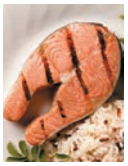
To guard against germs, unless you are in a hospital, don't bother with *antibacterial cleansers* — they are no more effective than plain soap in guarding against disease-causing germs.

DOESN'T WORK.

To reduce your risk of cancer, sip tea. Studies of black tea and green tea drinkers have shown a link between tea and reduced risks of certain cancers, including bladder, esophageal, ovarian, and possibly skin.

WORKS!



To lower your blood pressure, eat FISH! Most people should have about 2 grams of omega-3 fatty acids a week. That translates into two small, weekly servings of fatty fish like salmon, sardines, trout, and whitefish.

WORKS!

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Groundbreaking tablet

Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1 (16GB) $500

The 10-inch Galaxy Note adds capabilities that no other tablet, not even the Apple iPad, currently offers. It has a laptop-like ability to open more than one window at a time—say, your e-mail inbox and a video—and its stylus feature recognizes handwriting and lets you edit photos with finesse. An excellent performer overall, it almost matches the superb battery life of the iPad and adds a memory-card slot that its rival lacks.

TOP 10 electronics

A short list of standouts for performance & innovation

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Apple's best phone yet

iPhone 5 (16GB) $200 (with two-year contract)

The iPhone 5 builds on its predecessors' strengths and adds new features, putting it head and shoulders above previous iPhones. It has a bigger screen with excellent sharpness, a thinner profile, 4G access, and an expanded role for Siri, the super voice assistant. The already-best-in-class camera hits new heights, taking excellent photos and very good video. It's the best phone camera we've seen.

Android champion

Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB) $100 to $200 (with two-year contract)

If any phone deserves to be dubbed an iPhone 5 killer, this is it. Flaunting an excellent screen that's bigger (at 4.8 inches) than the iPhone 5's, this Android model offers some features you can't get on Apple's phone. You can watch a video while doing other tasks on the desktop, for example, and the screen is smart enough not to time out when you're looking at it. Ingenious gesture- and sensor-based tools are great for social networking.

Tip-top TV

Panasonic Viera TC-P55VT50 $2,500

OK, it costs a bundle, but this 55-inch plasma is one of the best TVs we've ever tested. Deep, rich blacks and spot-on colors contribute to superb picture quality, and it has an unlimited viewing angle, plus very good 3D performance and sound. It's loaded with state-of-the-art features, including a full Web browser, built-in Wi-Fi, and an extra touchpad remote, which make it easier to surf the Web and stream online video.

The Fire gets hotter

Amazon Kindle Fire HD (7-inch, 16GB) from $210 with charger

Amazon's top-of-the-line 7-inch tablet is one of the best for the price (though the new Barnes & Noble Nook tablets that just came out promise stiff competition, as would a small-screen iPad, rumored at press time). Videos look great on the HD display, and the screen is readable even in bright light. An 8.9-inch Fire HD, from $310 with charger, was set to launch on Nov. 20. Other Android tablets and the iPad offer more apps, but the Fire is a great choice for Amazon fans—especially for subscribers to Amazon Prime ($80 a year), which offers access to free Kindle Book loans and streaming movies and TV shows.

PHOTO (TV SCREEN): JEFF HUNTER/GETTY IMAGES

The world's smartest camera

Nikon Coolpix S800c $350

This 16-megapixel, Wi-Fi-enabled point-and-shoot camera is the first we've seen that runs Google's Android operating system and the apps that go with it. That opens up a whole new world for cameras: We used an app to edit an image, then quickly and easily posted it on Facebook. We also created a slideshow with music. Our tests weren't completed by press time, but the S800c looks promising overall.

Loaded lightweight

Sony Cyber-shot RX100 $650

You don't have to lug around a big, heavy camera to get great photos. This 20-megapixel point-and-shoot weighs about 9 ounces—half as much as many models of this type—but doesn't cut corners. With a large sensor and high-quality lens, it took exceptional photos in our initial tests and packs features normally found only on bulkier, pricier rivals. It deftly combines a nice selection of buttons and dials with a sophisticated menu system that won't overwhelm you.

Excellence in a box

Samsung HT-E6730W $800

This 7.1-channel system marries old-school vacuum tubes with digital amps to produce excellent sound, which is rare in our tests of home-theater-in-a-box systems. It comes with a 3D-capable Blu-ray player, wireless amplifiers for the rear surround speakers, Wi-Fi, an iPod dock, and Samsung's Smart TV platform. That includes a full Web browser, apps market, and Blockbuster, Hulu Plus, Netflix, and Pandora apps.

First ultrawide TV

Vizio CinemaWide XVT3D580CM $2,000

Cinephiles finally have a TV that displays flicks in all their wide-screen splendor. This 58-inch LCD set is the first we've tested with an ultrawide, 21:9 display that mimics the shape of a movie-theater screen. Most wide-format movies fill its screen without the black bars you see on a typical HDTV, though you will still get bars on lots of content, including high-def TV programs and movies formatted for a 16:9 screen. Other sets scored better for 3D, but this Vizio has an excellent HD picture, very good sound, a Bluetooth remote with a keyboard, and more.

PHOTO (TV SCREEN): ASCENT XMEDIA/GETTY IMAGES

Wi-Fi winner

Sonos Play:3 $300
plus $50 for wireless adapter

This compact stereo speaker system is a great, easy way to enjoy music throughout the house. Pair it with the Sonos Bridge adapter and you can wirelessly access streaming Internet radio stations and music from a computer that's on your Wi-Fi network. With one speaker, you'll get very good sound quality. Set up two Play:3s in one room as a two-speaker pair to get excellent sound that rivals what we've heard from any home-theater system. You can add Play:3s in other rooms and have each receive the same music source or varying ones.

More to come

Watch for this-just-in coverage of more hot new electronics in our January issue.

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Get the best deal

Where to buy electronics and how to bargain for the lowest price

BUYING ELECTRONICS ONLINE was more pleasing for CONSUMER REPORTS readers than buying at a walk-in store, according to our survey on almost 30,000 buying experiences. And the proportion of major electronics purchases that readers made online more than doubled from 2006 to 2011.

No wonder some big stores are cutting back. Best Buy, the biggest remaining chain, said it would close 50 of its 1,000 or so locations in 2012. Best Buy and Staples plan to shrink the size of many of their stores. Walmart, after years of expanding its electronics offerings, has stopped selling Amazon's Kindle tablets and e-book readers.

Retailers blame their sales woes in part on so-called showrooming, the consumer practice of checking products out firsthand in stores before buying them online. Some 18 percent of the 10,000-plus readers we surveyed who bought electronics products online fessed up to showrooming. More than half of that group eventually bought from Amazon.com, which accounted for almost two out of three online purchases in our survey.

Although online purchases have increased greatly in recent years, about twice as many respondents bought in stores as on the Internet. And though online shoppers were more satisfied overall, the best walk-in options got high marks, too, as the Ratings on the facing page reveal.

Wherever you shop, a few simple steps can help you get the best deal on a major electronics purchase.

Three ways to save

Consider coupons and gift cards. It's worth checking sites such as Techbargains.com for coupons and other deals. Relatively few of the readers we surveyed searched for online coupons before shopping in stores or on the Internet, but one in four of those who did found it to be worthwhile. Another useful tactic: Check retailers' ads and bargain sites to see whether they offer gift cards that can save you money on a future purchase from the retailer or manufacturer.

Six out of 10 who haggled in stores were successful.

Haggling can pay off. Negotiate for a major electronics item? Absolutely. Only one in eight of the in-store shoppers we surveyed tried, and those who did so this year were a bit less successful than in 2011. But hagglers who prevailed saved a median of $86. Negotiators for a TV set had the greatest savings, at $114, while those who bargained for a camera saved a healthy $63, up from $53 last year.

Negotiation was typically more successful at some stores, including independents, than others. Yet even one in four hagglers at Apple Stores, which are known for stable pricing, managed to get a break. You can also bargain online: 2 percent of online shoppers tried and half succeeded, most by phone or e-mail.

Our advice: Go to a walk-in store armed with evidence of the lowest price you've found online and ask whether the store will match the price or at least come close. You may have the greatest success in getting stores that also have websites to match their own online prices.

Skip the extra contracts. It's more likely than ever that you'll be pushed to buy an extended warranty on your major electronics purchase; about three-quarters of in-store shoppers were, up from two-thirds in 2011. P.C. Richard was again the pushiest retailer with those plans, which we think are seldom if ever a good buy (see Money, page 16).

At Best Buy, you might also be pitched on the chain's paid Geek Squad technical support. More than three-quarters of respondents who bought such services in stores and used them judged them excellent or very good. But free retailer tech support services (offered by stores such as Costco and Apple Store) pleased 87 percent of those who tried them.

PHOTO (TV SCREEN): AVTG/GETTY IMAGES; (PRICE TAGS) JACK FLASH/GETTY IMAGES

Ratings Electronics stores

All retailers rated In order of reader score.

☑ Recommended

Better ◀——▶ Worse

Recommendation	Order	Retailer	Reader score (0–100)	Price	Customer service	Product quality	Selection	Buying ease	Returns (days)
	A	**ONLINE STORES**							
☑	1	Newegg.com	95	●	◓	●	◓	●	30 [1]
☑	2	BHPhotoVideo.com	95	●	◓	●	●	●	30
☑	3	Amazon.com	94	◓	◓	◓	◓	●	30
☑	4	Costco.com	94	◓	◓	◓	◒	◓	90
☑	5	Apple.com	93	◒	◓	●	○	●	14 [2]
	6	Walmart.com	86	◓	○	○	○	○	[2]
	7	BestBuy.com	86	◓	◒	◓	◓	○	30
	B	**WALK-IN STORES**							
☑	1	Apple Store	92	◒	●	●	○	○	14 [2]
☑	2	Costco	92	●	○	◓	◒	○	90
☑	3	Independents	91	○	●	●	◓	◓	[3]
	4	Army & Air Force Exchange	89	◓	◓	●	○	○	30 [2]
	5	Sam's Club	87	◓	◒	◓	◒	○	[2]
	6	Staples	87	○	○	◓	○	○	14
	7	Target	86	○	○	◓	◒	○	90 [2]
	8	HHGregg	86	◓	◓	◓	◓	○	30 [1]
	9	BJ's Wholesale Club	86	◓	●	◓	●	○	[2]
	10	Sears	85	○	○	◓	○	○	30 [1]
	11	P.C. Richard & Son	83	○	◓	◓	○	○	20 [1]
	12	Best Buy	83	○	○	◓	○	○	30
	13	Fry's Electronics	82	◓	○	◓	○	◒	30 [1]
	14	Walmart	81	○	●	○	◒	◒	[2]

[1] Some categories of products might be excluded from returns or subject to restocking fees. [2] Policies may differ for some products. [3] Policies vary by store.

Overview

With so many retailers highly rated for overall satisfaction, you can choose largely on the basis of scored attributes that matter most to you. The recommended retailers listed below stood out for the reasons cited.

TOP ALL-AROUND ONLINE CHOICES

A1 Newegg.com
A2 BHPhotoVideo.com
A3 Amazon.com

A1, A2, and **A3** offer high satisfaction overall and had high marks for every rated attribute. But **A1** has a 15 percent restocking fee on some returns (unless item is defective or unopened).

TOP ALL-AROUND WALK-IN CHOICE

B3 Independents

No retail store got high marks across the board, but independents came close. And shoppers who negotiated prices at these stores were more successful on average than they were at Best Buy and Sears. **B3** matched **B1** for product quality and service and beat them on buying ease. **B3** also scored higher on selection than **B1**, which sells only its own products.

GREAT PRODUCTS AND SERVICE

A5 Apple.com
B1 Apple Store

While you can't expect low prices from Apple, you can expect high-quality gear and hand-holding.

LOW PRICES AND HIGH-QUALITY PRODUCTS

A4 Costco.com
B2 Costco

This membership warehouse club doesn't pretend to do it all, but what it does it does well—selling quality products at competitive prices. Just don't expect a wide selection of merchandise or top-notch in-store service.

Guide to the Ratings

Scores are based on 29,910 purchases of TVs, digital cameras, digital camcorders, DVD and Blu-ray players, GPS devices, video-game consoles, e-book readers, tablets, and MP3 players by 23,639 Consumer Reports readers between January 2011 and June 2012. Electronics retailers are among the highest-rated services in Consumer Reports National Research Center surveys. Results might not reflect the U.S. population. **Reader score** reflects overall satisfaction with the shopping experience and is not limited to the factors in the survey results. A score of 100 would mean all respondents were completely satisfied; 80, that respondents were very satisfied on average. Differences of fewer than 5 points are not meaningful. The scores under **survey results** reflect how each retailer did compared with the others. Scores for **customer service** and **buying ease** are not directly comparable between walk-in and online retailers. **Customer service** reflects online or phone support for websites and in-store sales help for walk-in stores. Online **buying ease** reflects using the website; in-store **buying ease,** fewer problems such as sale items being unavailable, long checkout lines, and crowded displays.

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STEP 3: Find out your Consumer Reports Bottom Line Price

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Tablets

Screens get sharper, and prices drop

No electronics category has changed more in the past year than tablets, and all for the better. Performance is up, especially for the best lower-priced models, and the features and versatility of tablets are expanding fast. New models large and small are challenging the high-scoring iPad on convenience and cost.

Look for these trends

Lower prices, better displays. High-performing 7-inch models such as the Amazon Kindle Fire HD, $200 and up, and the Google Nexus 7, $250, have lowered the cost of buying a fine smaller tablet. But Barnes & Noble's new 9-inch Nook HD+, $270, looks like an even bigger game changer: By offering resolution almost equal to that of Apple's Retina display at about half the price, it lowers the price of that technology and increases the likelihood that Apple itself will soon offer its own smaller, lower-priced iPad.

At press time, we hadn't tested the Nook HD+ and its 7-inch sibling, the Nook HD, because they weren't yet available. But we used both at a Barnes & Noble event, and you can check out our initial impressions in the box at right.

The app gap still exists. The breadth and quality of Apple's app market is still a major competitive edge for the iPad. Games for iPad are still more innovative, for example, with popular titles such as Infinity Blade (free), a game of knights and swordplay, and The Room ($5), a puzzle/mystery game. And the quality of apps for iPad continues to overshadow those for Android. Also, many magazines have their own interactive iPad apps that make the device a great magazine reader; there are far fewer such apps for Android users, although the Nook and Fire are adding more.

Still, if you buy an Android tablet, you'll have access to many important apps available on the iPad, such as Amazon Kindle reader, Facebook, Quickoffice Pro, Skype, and Twitter. Also, with prices dropping and performance rising for Android tablets, the market for Android apps and, therefore, the number of useful titles, should grow significantly over the next few years.

If you're considering an Amazon or Barnes & Noble tablet, though, note that the app stores for those devices, though offering thousands of apps, contain only those handpicked by the respective tablet maker. Google's Play Store, which most other Android tablets use, isn't as strictly controlled, so it offers many more titles.

Windows 8 tablets are coming. Microsoft has announced a variety of tablets available in the coming months that use a mobile version of Windows 8 or a simpler version called Windows RT. Details are still sketchy, but the Windows RT tablets should be priced competitively with existing iPads and Android-based models. Windows 8 models appear to be designed

New Nooks offer more for readers and shoppers

FIRE FIGHTER The Nook HD weighs about 20 percent less than the Kindle Fire HD, and its high-definition screen has greater resolution.

As befits a bookseller, Barnes & Noble emphasizes reading with its new Nook tablets. The 7-inch Nook HD is sized to fit comfortably in one hand, and at 11.1 ounces, it's light enough to hold for a long stretch of reading. The 9-inch Nook HD+, at little more than a pound, still weighs 20 percent less than the 9.7-inch iPad. Being more square-shaped than the Nook HD, it's also better suited for reading magazines. We haven't tested either of those models but will report on them as soon as we have.

Barnes & Noble says its magazine selection includes the top 100 best-selling magazines (including Consumer Reports). A new visual table of contents shows each page in a thumbnail format, so you can easily select articles.

Shopping looks a lot better than on the old Nook, too. A list of Channels helps you find books that meet specific interests and includes categories such as Forensic Mysteries, Jane Austen and Heirs, and Sophisticated Journeys. Related movies and other content will also be added. A new Nook video service features movies you can rent or buy from Disney, HBO, Sony, and others.

People who share tablets can set up personalized profiles for each user, which will be especially handy for parents sharing the tablet with their kids. You'll be able to control what children look at or buy, although the parental controls don't offer as many features as those on the Kindle Fire tablets, which let you set time limits on usage.

Catalogs from retailers such as L.L.Bean and Pottery Barn can be delivered to these new Nooks. Links for each product will take you directly to the retailers' Web page, where you can buy those items. You can create scrapbooks by selecting pages from catalogs and magazines and placing them in folders for future reference.

and priced to compete with the smallest, more costly laptops, such as the MacBook Air and Ultrabook models.

Windows RT tablets will include a version of Microsoft Office similar to the one that runs on computers. The only apps available will be those sold in the Microsoft Store, so you probably won't be able to get most of the other Windows applications you're used to using on your PC. The higher-priced Windows 8 tablets will be able to use traditional Windows software.

Tablets get more laptoplike. So far, the Windows 8 tablets we've heard about have been higher-priced models, seemingly designed as alternatives to laptops. Some feature removable keyboards or have displays that flip around and fold over to form tablets.

Samsung's 11.6-inch Series 5 and Series 7 Slate tablets, for example, have removable keyboard docks. The Series 5 costs $750 with the keyboard, $650 without. The Series 7, $1,200 and available only with the keyboard, has a 128-gigabyte solid-state drive. Both weigh less than 2 pounds without the keyboards.

Some Windows 8 tablets will use traditional software.

Another Android-based tablet, the 10.1-inch Samsung Galaxy Note, is the first tablet on the market that lets you have two active windows open on the screen at once—a feature that takes tablets one step closer to working like laptops. For example, you can watch a video in one window while browsing the Web in another. (The feature works only with certain apps.)

HP is riding the wave of Windows 8 to re-enter the tablet market. The HP Envy x2 also uses a keyboard dock and has an 11.6-inch display. Without the keyboard, it weighs 1.5 pounds. The Envy x2 also incorporates NFC (Near Field Communication) technology, which lets you transfer photos or other files by touching one device to another.

Screen size may well be a key factor in determining whether tablets like those replace laptops. Even with the larger models, such as the 11.6-inch models from HP and Samsung, you sacrifice quite a bit of screen real estate.

A1 Apple

D2 Google

D5 Samsung

Overview

You can download apps from authorized markets on all models we recommend, so you're less likely to encounter malware or other problems. The app markets for Amazon and Barnes & Noble tablets are controlled by the tablet makers, so they have fewer apps than you'd find in the Google Play store.

☑ **CR Best Buy** These ranges offer the most performance for the price. All are recommended.

☑ **Recommended** These high-performing models are all fine choices and include CR Best Buys.

BEST 9- TO 10-INCH TABLETS

A1 Apple $630
B1 Apple $500
B2 Samsung $500
B11 Apple $400

A1 and **B1** are still the best tablets, thanks largely to the superb screen and long battery life. **B2** is the only tablet that lets you view two active windows at the same time. It includes a stylus and related apps and is among the lighter models in its size. **B11** is the prior-generation iPad, but it's a great deal.

BEST VALUES IN 7-INCH TABLETS

C6 Samsung $350 **CR Best Buy**
D2 Google $250 **CR Best Buy**
D3 Amazon $210 **CR Best Buy**
D5 Samsung $250 **CR Best Buy**
D8 Amazon $170 **CR Best Buy**

C6 has 3G/4G capability. **D2** and **D5** are reasonably-priced Android tablets with full access to the Google Play market. **D2** has a high-definition display. **D5** includes a memory-card slot. **D3** features a high-def display at a great price. It also had the longest battery life among 7-inch models. **D8** is the first sub-$200 tablet we've recommended. **D3** and **D8** are especially attractive for Amazon Prime subscribers ($80 a year), who get free streaming videos and other benefits. But the app market isn't as extensive as Apple's App Store or the Google Play store.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is based on portability, ease of use, display, versatility and touch response. **Portability** combines size, weight, and battery life. **Ease of use** is based on a variety of scenarios, including reading books, playing media, using e-mail, and browsing the Web. **Display** covers color, viewing angle, brightness, and glare. **Versatility** represents the presence of useful features. **Touch response** indicates the responsiveness of the touch screen when selecting and moving objects or typing. **Battery life** is measured while Web surfing over Wi-Fi. **Weight** is without any case or cover. You can add to internal storage if the model has a **memory-card reader. Acts as Wi-Fi hotspot** means it can use a cellular carrier's data plan to connect other devices, such as laptops, to the Internet. **Approved app market** indicates that it can access a variety of applications authorized by the operating-system manufacturer. **Price,** which is approximate retail, is for the wireless connectivity and internal storage shown.

Ratings Tablets

Recommended models only From 55 tested.

Excellent · Very good · Good · Fair · Poor

CR Best Buy · Recommended

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Screen size (in.)	Test results: Portability	Ease of use	Display	Versatility	Touch response	Battery life (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Features & specs: Storage options (GB)	Operating system	Cellular data	Act as Wi-Fi hotspot	Memory-card reader	Camera	GPS	Approved app market	Fingerprint-resistant screen
	A	**9- TO 10-INCH SCREEN, 4G PLUS WI-FI** Best if you want a large display, but you pay more for broadband access.																			
✔	1	**Apple** iPad (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB) (3rd gen.)	$630	85	9.7	Excellent	Very good	Excellent	Very good	Excellent	11.6	1.5	16, 32 or 64	iOS 6	•	•		•	•	•	•
✔	2	**Apple** iPad 2 (Wi-Fi, 3G, 16GB)	530	81	9.7	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	11.6	1.3	16, 32 or 64	iOS 6	•			•	•	•	•
✔	3	**Motorola** Droid Xyboard 10.1 (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB)	530	80	10.1	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	8.9	1.3	16, 32 or 64	And. 4	•	•		•	•	•	•
✔	4	**Samsung** Galaxy Tab 10.1 (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB)	530	80	10.1	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	8.9	1.3	16 or 32	And. 3.1	•	•		•	•	•	•
	B	**9- TO 10-INCH SCREEN, WI-FI-ONLY** Best if you need only Wi-Fi and want to save money on a large display.																			
✔	1	**Apple** iPad (Wi-Fi, 16GB) (3rd gen.)	500	83	9.7	Excellent	Very good	Excellent	Very good	Excellent	11.5	1.5	16, 32 or 64	iOS 6				•		•	•
✔	2	**Samsung** Galaxy Note 10.1 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	500	83	10.1	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	11.1	1.3	16 or 32	And. 4			•	•	•	•	•
✔	3	**Asus** Eee Pad Transformer Prime TF201 (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	500	82	10.1	Excellent	Very good	Excellent	Very good	Excellent	8.5	1.3	32 or 64	And. 4			•	•	•	•	•
✔	4	**Asus** Transformer Pad Infinity TF700T (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	500	82	10.1	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	8.0	1.3	32 or 64	And. 4			•	•	•	•	•
✔	5	**Samsung** Galaxy Tab 2 (10.1) (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	400	81	10.1	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	12.4	1.3	16	And. 4			•	•	•	•	•
✔	6	**Acer** Iconia Tab A700 (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	450	80	10.1	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	9.5	1.5	32	And. 4			•	•	•	•	•
✔	7	**Asus** Transformer Pad TF300T (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	350	80	10.1	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	8.9	1.4	16 or 32	And. 4			•	•	•	•	•
✔	8	**Lenovo** IdeaTab S2109 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	250	79	9.7	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	10.0	1.3	8, 16 or 32	And. 4			•		•	•	
✔	9	**Toshiba** Excite 10 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	400	79	10.1	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	8.8	1.3	16, 32 or 64	And. 4			•	•	•	•	
✔	10	**Toshiba** Excite 10LE (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	530	79	10.1	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	8.1	1.1	16 or 32	And. 4			•	•	•	•	•
✔	11	**Apple** iPad 2 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	400	78	9.7	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Good	Excellent	11.6	1.3	16, 32 or 64	iOS 6				•		•	•
✔	12	**Acer** Iconia Tab A510 (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	430	78	10.1	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	10.0	1.5	32	And. 4			•	•	•	•	•
✔	13	**Lenovo** IdeaTab S2110 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	400	77	10.1	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	10.8	1.2	16 or 32	And. 4				•		•	•
✔	14	**Motorola** Xoom (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	500	76	10.1	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	11.0	1.6	32	And. 4			•	•	•	•	•
✔	15	**Asus** Eee Pad Transformer (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	400	76	10.1	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	9.0	1.5	16	And. 4			•	•	•	•	•
	C	**7- TO 8-INCH SCREEN, 4G PLUS WI-FI** Best for portability, but you pay more for broadband access.																			
✔	1	**Samsung** Galaxy Tab 7.7 (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB)	550	82	7.7	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	8.3	0.8	16	And. 3.2	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
✔	2	**Pantech** Element (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB)	400	77	8.0	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	10.2	1.0	16	And. 3.2	•		•	•	•	•	
✔	3	**Samsung** Galaxy Tab 7.0 Plus (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB)	430	76	7.0	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	6.2	0.8	16	And. 3.2	•	•	•	•	•	•	
✔	4	**T-Mobile** SpringBoard (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB)	400	75	7.0	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	6.1	0.9	16	And. 4	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
✔	5	**Motorola** Droid Xyboard 8.2 (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB)	430	75	8.2	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	5.2	0.9	16 or 32	And. 3.2	•	•		•	•	•	•
✔	6	**Samsung** Galaxy Tab 2 (7.0) (Wi-Fi, 4G, 8GB)	350	74	7.0	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Good	Excellent	8.3	0.8	8	And. 4	•	•	•	•	•	•	
✔	7	**ZTE** Optik (Wi-Fi, 3G, 16GB)	350	72	7.0	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	6.6	0.9	16	And. 3.2	•	•	•	•	•	•	
✔	8	**Sony** Tablet P (Wi-Fi, 4G, 4GB)	350	67	7.0	Good	Very good	Very good	Good	Excellent	6.3	0.8	4	And. 3.2	•		•	•	•	•	
	D	**7- TO 8-INCH SCREEN, WI-FI-ONLY** Best for portability, and you save money with Wi-Fi-only access.																			
✔	1	**Toshiba** Excite 7.7 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	500	80	7.7	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	9.3	0.7	16 or 32	And. 4			•	•	•	•	•
✔	2	**Google** Nexus 7 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	250	77	7.0	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Good	Excellent	9.5	0.7	8 or 16	And. 4.1					•	•	•
✔	3	**Amazon** Kindle Fire HD (Wi-Fi, 16GB)*	210	77	7.0	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Good	Excellent	10.7	0.9	16 or 32	And. 4					•	•
✔	4	**Samsung** Galaxy Tab 7.0 Plus (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	350	74	7.0	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	6.5	0.8	16 or 32	And. 4			•	•	•	•	
✔	5	**Samsung** Galaxy Tab 2 (7.0) (Wi-Fi, 8GB)	250	73	7.0	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Good	Excellent	8.3	0.8	8	And. 4			•	•	•	•	
✔	6	**Toshiba** Thrive 7" (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	380	71	7.0	Good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	5.0	0.8	16 or 32	And. 4			•	•	•	•	
✔	7	**BlackBerry** PlayBook (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	250	70	7.0	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good	Very good	7.6	1.0	32 or 64	RIM QNX 2				•	•	•	•
✔	8	**Amazon** Kindle Fire (Wi-Fi, 8GB) (2nd gen.)*	170	66	7.0	Very good	Very good	Very good	Good	Excellent	7.6	0.9	8	And. 4						•	•

*Amazon models' price includes optional $10 charger.

E-book readers

Lighted screens and lower prices ramp up the reasons to buy one

THE TABLET and the smart phone may be the hottest devices of the season. But the e-book reader is less expensive than either and better for reading books.

Thanks to improved screens and a continuing price war, it's the perfect gift for the book lover in your life who's ready to go digital.

Watch for these trends

Prices have dropped, again. The cutthroat competition between Amazon and Barnes & Noble continues to deliver lower prices for e-book readers. Amazon's basic, ad-supported Kindle is now just $70. At press time, the least expensive Nook was still $100, but we wouldn't be surprised to see that go lower, given the history of Amazon and Barnes & Noble matching or beating each other's prices.

The lower cost of readers should make even those who now read e-books on a tablet consider acquiring a reader as well, since it provides a better book-reading experience in most respects (see the comparison below).

Electronic books are also cheaper. The settlement of a federal suit accusing publishers of colluding to raise prices on e-books has allowed Amazon to resume discounting titles. The $9.99 price is once again becoming more prevalent for its Kindle Books, with other booksellers also meeting that price.

Screens are lighting up. The top-rated Nook Simple Touch with GlowLight, $120, has been a runaway hit since it was introduced in June. Now the Nook has two competitors. The Amazon Kindle Paperwhite, $120, in the Ratings, and Kobo Glo, $130, which we hadn't received as of press time, also have LED lighting on their energy-frugal e-ink screens.

All three readers promise a month or more of reading on a charge, even with the light on. That's far longer than devices with LCD screens, such as tablets.

Reader or tablet for e-reading?

E-book reader
Nook Simple Touch with GlowLight

Price $120
Readability, bright light Excellent
Battery life 30+ days
Weight 7.1 ounces

VS.

Tablet
Google Nexus 7

Price $200
Readability, bright light Very good
Battery life 9.5 hours
Weight 11.8 ounces

You probably already own, or plan to buy, a tablet or laptop computer. If so, you can use apps from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and others to read e-books and do a host of other things. Plus, you get a color screen.

By contrast, most e-book readers allow you to e-read and little else, and on a black-and-white screen. Why bother with such a limited device?

For one, because you *can* do little on it except read. It might seem like a drawback that e-book readers typically lack a good Web browser or e-mail client, and the ability to download apps. But many bookworms actually appreciate the e-book reader's limited ability to multitask, since it encourages a single-minded focus on reading—and reading books, specifically. As for color capability, it's helpful if you plan to read magazines but is all but irrelevant for reading most e-books, at least for adults.

The specs and performance data above, for a top-rated reader and a comparably sized tablet, reflect the other reasons for reading on a reader: an easier-to-read screen (especially in bright light), lighter weight, and much longer battery life.

Overview

Rated models have 6- or 7-inch black-and-white e-ink screens except 5, which has a color LCD screen. They also all have access to an extensive, dedicated e-book store for their brand. But keep in mind that e-books bought from one brand's store can't be read on another brand's e-book readers—so you can't take your library with you if you switch brands of reader.

BEST VALUES

2 Barnes & Noble $100 **CR Best Buy**
7 Kobo $100 **CR Best Buy**
8 Amazon $70 **CR Best Buy**

These models exemplify just how much e-book reader you can get for $100 or less. **2** offers fine touch navigation, along with the option to turn pages by touching bars on each side of the screen, and its "footprint" is unusually small. **7** also has a touch screen and is lighter, but you can turn pages only by touch. **8** is the lightest (and cheapest) of the trio but lacks a touch screen and carries ads and special offers from Amazon on its screen saver and along the bottom of its library screen. (An ad-free version is available for $90.)

BEST FOR A RANGE OF LIGHT CONDITIONS

1 Barnes & Noble $120
3 Amazon $180
4 Amazon $120

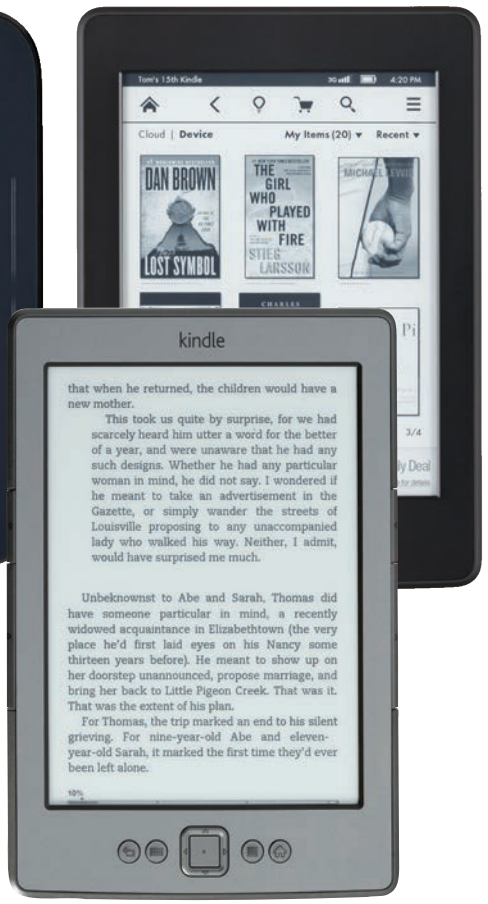
These excellent performers all have a touch screen that's lit by LED lights that can aid readability in both dim and very bright lighting. **1,** a sibling of the Nook Simple Touch, **2,** is the lightest, and fastest to turn on or to wake from the sleep mode. It also allows you to navigate with either touch or physical controls; **3** and **4** have only touch navigation. But **3** and **4** have the best contrast and resolution we've ever seen, and their LED lighting is a little more even than on **1**. **3** allows you to buy books via 3G, too. Both carry ads and special offers from Amazon on the screen saver and library screen. (Ad-free versions are available for $20 extra.)

IF COLOR IS IMPORTANT

6 Barnes & Noble $150
The only color-screen model in the Ratings, this is an inexpensive option for reading e-magazines and illustrated e-books. But some decent tablets now cost only a little more and perform better.

2 Barnes & Noble

3 Amazon



7 Kobo

8 Amazon

Ratings E-book readers

Recommended models only From 25 tested.

Excellent
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor

CR Best Buy
Recommended

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model (Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.)	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Readability	Versatility	Responsiveness	Page turn	Navigation	File support	Battery life (claimed)	Weight (oz.)	Display size (in.)	Touchscreen
✔	1	**Barnes & Noble** Nook Simple Touch with GlowLight	$120	83	Very good	Very good	Excellent	Excellent	Very good	Very good	60 days/30 with GlowLight	7.1	6	•
✔	2	**Barnes & Noble** Nook Simple Touch Reader	100	82	Very good	Very good	Excellent	Excellent	Very good	Very good	60 days	7.5	6	•
✔	3	**Amazon** Kindle Paperwhite 3G with Special Offers Amazon Kindle Paperwhite 3G without Special Offers $200	180	82	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	Very good	Very good	56 days	7.8	6	•
✔	4	**Amazon** Kindle Paperwhite with Special Offers Amazon Kindle Paperwhite without Special Offers $140	120	81	Very good	Good	Very good	Excellent	Very good	Very good	56 days	7.8	6	•
✔	5	**Amazon** Kindle Keyboard 3G with Special Offers Amazon Kindle Keyboard 3G without Special Offers $160	140	79	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	Very good	Very good	60 days	8.2	6	
✔	6	**Barnes & Noble** Nook Color	150	77	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Up to 8 hours	15.8	6.8	•
✔	7	**Kobo** eReader Touch Edition	100	75	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	30 days	6.6	6	•
✔	8	**Amazon** Kindle with Special Offers Amazon Kindle without Special Offers $90	70	74	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	30 days	5.9	6	
✔	9	**Sony** Reader PRS-T2	130	74	Very good	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good	60 days*	5.7	6	•
✔	10	**Kobo** Vox eReader	180	66	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good	Good	7 hours	14.5	7	•

*Manufacturer specifies this figure is with Wi-Fi off. Claim is 42 days with Wi-Fi on.

Computers

What to expect from Windows 8, plus Ratings of Apple models

Might a laptop be your next tablet? Maybe, if Microsoft has its way. Windows 8, the just-launched version of the ubiquitous computer operating system, brings to laptops and desktops more of the touch-screen capability that has made the iPad and Android-based tablets so compelling to use.

Because of Windows 8's debut, PC makers were revamping their models at press time, so we weren't able to test any new models for this report. We'll cover the first Windows 8 computers in the January issue. (Tablets and smart phones with their own versions of Windows 8 are also hitting the market; see the reports on pages 27 and 47, respectively.)

Apple's latest desktops and laptops are rated on page 34. They, too, have a new operating system. (See "Mountain Lion Is a Leap Forward," on page 35.)

Here's what you need to know about Windows 8 if you're shopping for a PC:

It's more tabletlike. The new OS has two user interfaces. One is almost identical to Windows 7's desktop. The other, called the Start screen, resembles a tablet in the way it organizes items—by grouping tiles for e-mail, photos, video, social networking, and all of your apps—and with its use of touch. You can easily switch between the two.

Its touch capability is a hit. When we upgraded a touch-screen-enabled Windows 7 computer by installing the final version of Windows 8, we found the touch capability quite intuitive. In the course of performing various tasks, we moved almost effortlessly from touch screen to keyboard to mouse as needed, although you'll probably use touch much less often in the traditional desktop interface.

There are rough spots. The Start screen will feel familiar if you've used a tablet, or even a smart phone. But the traditional desktop interface lacks the Start button that Windows users have relied on for years, so to perform some common tasks, you need to learn a different way to select them. For example, to power down, restart, or access the control panel, you swipe from the right side of the screen (or move the cursor to the upper- or lower-right corner), then touch or click on icons twice before clicking on the task you want to perform. You can power down more directly using a keyboard shortcut. Clicking on icons also works on the Start screen, but the keyboard shortcut doesn't.

You can restore the Start button to the desktop using a third-party app called Start8 (*stardock.com/products/start8*). A beta version we tried made shutting down easier to do within the desktop interface.

Upgrading might not be worth it. Any Windows 7 PC bought between June 2012 and January 2013 can be upgraded to Windows 8 for $15 until the end of February. You can also upgrade from older versions of Windows for $40, but you might need to first install service packs. And some old applications may not be compatible.

If your PC doesn't have a touch screen, you may not be able to get the full benefit of the Start screen. We'll let you know whether Windows 8's other benefits are worth the upgrade once we've tested the released version.

Here are some other computer trends:

Expect more touch capability. Some all-in-one desktops have had touch screens

The first Windows 8 PCs show promise

The first Windows 8 computers to hit our labs, the Acer Aspire V5-571-6891 laptop and Gateway One ZX6980-UB308 AIO desktop, offer an intriguing glimpse into how computer makers can keep prices down without entirely sacrificing Windows 8's touch capability.

The 15-inch Aspire is a case in point. Acer was able to hold the price at $500 by using a less costly Intel Core i3 processor and a 500-gigabyte hard drive instead of the pricier, lightweight solid-state drive found in Ultrabooks and the MacBook Air.

Although there's no touch screen, which would have increased the Acer's price, there's an enhanced touchpad that supports a variety of useful finger gestures. For example, to scroll through apps, you swipe the touchpad from the left. To switch between Windows 8's two interfaces, you pull down from the top of the pad using four fingers.

Microsoft says that Windows 8 resumes activity from sleep mode more quickly than Windows 7. When we made that comparison, using the Acer and two similarly configured Windows 7 laptops, the difference was negligible: The Acer took 1 second to resume; the others each took 2. But when shutting down, the Acer took 15 seconds, and the others took just 11.

The Gateway, a $750 all-in-one, has a 23-inch touch screen. It uses a Pentium processor and has a 500GB hard drive. There's no touchpad, but you can control the cursor and apps by gesturing in front of the screen, such as by moving your hand horizontally. Even with the screen's sensitivity set to low, the gesture controls sometimes kicked in unexpectedly.

One pleasant surprise: Both computers have onscreen buttons for such functions as shut down, restart, sleep, and hibernate, to compensate for Windows 8's lack of the familiar Start button on its desktop interface.

Bottom line. With tweaks like these by PC makers, the latest computers should ease your transition to Windows 8's new approach.

for a while, but touch has been much less common on laptops. That's about to change, with more touch-screen-enabled laptops about to hit the market. A touch screen could add roughly $100 to a laptop's price, but it's worth considering.

Gesture controls are coming. Even without a touch screen, you should still be able to enjoy some new tricks on a Windows 8 computer. Some new laptops and desktops have touchpads with enhanced multitouch capabilities that make the most of Windows 8. For example, on some laptops we've seen that have such touchpads, you can swipe from left or right to bring up icons and shortcuts new to Windows 8. So if your budget won't cover a new touch-screen-equipped PC, look for one with an enhanced touchpad.

Other manufacturers are adding gesture controls that let you raise volume or scroll through Web pages by waving a hand in front of the screen. See "The First Windows 8 PCs Show Promise," on the facing page.

More touch-screen laptops are about to hit the market.

Some Windows 8 PCs with the newest Intel processors will also respond to voice commands. Those models may well allow you to type on physical and virtual keyboards, use touchpads with enhanced capabilities, use hand gestures, take advantage of touch screens, and speak commands—all on the same computer.

Netbooks are passé. There's little need for them in the era of tablets, MacBook Air, Ultrabooks, and Windows 8. And because Microsoft hasn't announced the low-cost version of Windows 8 that netbooks' low price would require, any netbook you buy this season will almost certainly not include the new OS.

The netbook's successor might be a 9- or 10-inch tablet paired with a Bluetooth or docking keyboard, which adds about $50 to the cost. Such a combination would cost hundreds less than the lightest laptops.

Where to buy computers

Even the lowest-rated retailers pleased most customers, according to a survey by the Consumer Reports National Research Center. For the first time, we asked readers to rate independent local stores. Independents scored highly, especially for service. Not one respondent who shopped at an independent reported any problem finding a salesperson, so it's no surprise that four out of 10 shoppers who frequented independents did so because of their knowledgeable sales staff.

Apple's website stood out among the manufacturers' sites, but the others also did well and are the place to go to customize a particular brand of computer. Return policies vary among stores and sites. So do restocking fees.

BEST WEBSITES FOR PCs

A1 Costco.com
A2 Amazon.com
A3 Newegg.com
A4 TigerDirect.com

All were above average for selection and price, with the exception of **A1,** which does not offer a wide selection. But **A1** gives you 90 days to return an item; **A2** and **A3,** 30 days; **A4,** 14 days. **A3** charges a restocking fee of up to 25 percent for opened computers but no fee if packaging is unopened.

BEST WALK-IN STORES FOR PCs

C2 Independents
C3 Micro Center
C4 Costco

What **C2** lacks in selection and price, it makes up for in service. **C3** and **C4** offer the best prices among walk-in stores. **C3** also offers above-average selection and service. But there are only 22 stores in 16 states, and computers must be returned within 15 days. **C4** has a slim selection, and you have to pay a membership fee. But its return policy of 90 days is generous.

BEST PLACES TO BUY A MAC

B1 Apple.com
C1 Apple Store

Apple's website and stores offer the best experience for buying Macs. But the return policy for computers is only 14 days. You might also consider **C2** for buying Apple computers. You can also find Apple products at **A2** and **A5.**

Guide to the Ratings

Reader score reflects respondents' satisfaction with their purchase experience and isn't limited to factors listed in the survey results. A score of 100 would mean all respondents were completely satisfied; 80 would mean very satisfied, on average; 60, fairly well satisfied. Differences in scores of fewer than 5 points aren't meaningful. Respondents rated vendors on their **selection** of computers, **prices,** and **service** (including knowledge and attentiveness of staff for walk-ins and usability for websites). These ratings are relative based on how each vendor compares with the others. Results are based on 16,353 responses from subscribers who bought new desktops and laptops from January 2011 through June 2012. Survey results might not reflect the U.S. population as a whole.

Ratings Retailers

In order of reader score.

☑ Recommended

Better ⟷ Worse

Recommendation	Order	Retailer	Reader score (0–100)	Selection	Price	Service
		A WEBSITES/CATALOGS				
☑	1	Costco.com	90	○	●	◓
☑	2	Amazon.com	90	●	◓	●
☑	3	Newegg.com	90	●	●	●
☑	4	TigerDirect.com	89	◓	◓	◓
	5	Best Buy.com	83	○	○	○
		B MANUFACTURER WEBSITES/CATALOGS				
☑	1	Apple	92	●	●	●
	2	Toshiba	85	◓	○	◓
	3	HP	85	◓	○	◓
	4	Lenovo	84	●	○	○
	5	Dell	82	◓	○	◓
		C WALK-IN STORES				
☑	1	Apple Store	91	●	◒	●
☑	2	Independents	86	○	○	●
☑	3	Micro Center	86	◓	◓	●
☑	4	Costco	85	●	◓	◒
	5	Staples	81	○	○	◓
	6	Sam's Club	81	●	○	●
	7	Office Depot	80	◒	○	○
	8	Office Max	80	◒	◒	○
	9	Best Buy	78	○	◒	○
	10	Fry's Electronics	78	◓	○	◒
	11	Walmart	76	●	○	●

More Ratings on next page

Overview

There are no Windows-based computers in the Ratings because at press time most models had been discontinued in advance of the release of Windows 8. Apple was among the most reliable desktop brands and had the best technical support. For details, see "Best Brands," on page 50.

BEST ALL-IN-ONE DESKTOP

1 Apple $1,700

This all-in-one Mac had one of the best displays we've seen, with realistic, natural colors. But it was somewhat glare-prone. Performance was excellent. Discrete graphics make it a capable gaming performer, and the large, 1-terabyte hard drive can store tons of photos, music, and videos.

BEST THIN-AND-LIGHT LAPTOP

B1 Apple $1,200

This thin-and-light Mac laptop was an excellent performer. Battery life was very long, providing well over a workday's worth of juice. The 13.3-inch display was bright, with a wide viewing angle, and colors were natural-looking and realistic. Features include a 128-gigabyte solid-state drive, which uses less power and accesses data more quickly.

BEST IF YOU NEED A HIGH-RESOLUTION DISPLAY

C1 Apple $2,200

Thin and light compared with most 15-inch laptops, Apple's latest professional offering uses its Retina display, with screen resolution of 2880x1800. Battery life was exceptional. Performance was excellent. It has plenty of storage, considering that it uses a solid-state drive.

Ratings Apple all-in-one computers

☑ Recommended

● Excellent ◓ Very good ○ Good ◒ Fair ● Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Processor	Memory (GB)	Storage (GB)	Video memory (MB)	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Versatility	Performance	Ergonomics	Display	Speakers	Display size (in.)	Wi-Fi type (802.11)	Suitable for gaming	Wireless mouse	Memory-card reader	Digital video out	FireWire port	Thunderbolt port
		ALL-IN-ONE Sleek and space-saving; monitor, computer, webcam, and speakers are in a single unit.																			
☑	1	**Apple** iMac 27-inch MC813LL/A	Core i5 2.7GHz	4	1000	512	$1,700	71	◓	●	○	●	◓	27.0	n	•	•	•	•	•	•
☑	2	**Apple** iMac 21.5-inch MC309LL/A	Core i5 2.5GHz	4	500	512	1,200	65	○	●	○	◓	◓	21.5	n	•	•	•	•	•	•

Ratings Apple laptops

☑ Recommended

● Excellent ◓ Very good ○ Good ◒ Fair ● Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Display size (in.)	Processor	Memory (GB)	Storage (GB)	Video memory (MB)	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Ergonomics	Portability	Performance	Versatility	Display	Battery life (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Thin and light	Blu-ray or DVD	Memory-card reader	Built-in webcam	FireWire port	Thunderbolt port	Digital video out	Multitouch touchpad	Non-removable battery
	A	**11-INCH** Best choice for mobility.																							
☑	1	**Apple** MacBook Air 11-inch MD223LL/A	11.6	Core i5 1.7GHz	4	64		$1,000	74	◓	●	●	◒	◓	6 1/2	2.4	•		•		•		•	•
	B	**13-INCH** Best choice for mobility without sacrificing performance.																							
☑	1	**Apple** MacBook Air 13-inch MD231LL/A	13.3	Core i5 1.8GHz	4	128		1,200	82	◓	●	●	◒	◓	9 1/2	3.0	•		•	•		•	•	•
☑	2	**Apple** MacBook Pro 13-inch MD101LL/A	13.3	Core i5 2.5GHz	4	500		1,200	74	◓	◓	●	◓	○	7 1/2	4.5		D	•	•	•	•	•	•
	C	**15-INCH** Best choice for a larger display.																							
☑	1	**Apple** MacBook Pro 15-inch with Retina display MC975LL/A	15.4	Core i7 2.3GHz	8	250	1024	2,200	80	●	●	●	○	●	10	4.5	•		•	•		•	•	•	•
☑	2	**Apple** MacBook Pro 15-inch MD103LL/A	15.4	Core i7 2.3GHz	4	500	512	1,800	75	◓	●	●	◓	◓	9 1/2	5.6		D	•	•	•	•		•	•

1 Apple

B1 Apple

Mountain Lion is a leap forward

Apple's new version of Mac OS, Mountain Lion, is a worthwhile $20 upgrade, especially if you have more than one Apple device, love social networking, and want a better version of the Safari browser. All of the desktops and laptops in the Ratings include it.

Here's what it offers:

Better synchronization across Apple devices. Set a reminder on your iMac at home, and schedule it to show up on your iPad when you get to work. Or jot down a shopping list on an iPad, then pick it up from your iPhone once you get to the supermarket.

It's more social. New menu items provide easy updates to Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and others. You can also send pictures from iPhoto to various social networks.

A better Safari. The newest browser version includes features such as offline reading and bookmarks that show up across all your devices. If you're browsing on your iPad and want to move to your MacBook, Safari will pick up where you left off online.

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1212AFR

Audio/video gear

Headphones

Headphones come in all styles, sizes, and prices. Small, lower-priced earbuds and folding on-ear models are great replacements for the standard earphones that come with the iPod and other portable players. Larger on-ear and over-ear models are generally better suited for use at home. Designs that fit inside the ear canal or that completely cover the ears can create a seal that helps block outside sounds. Noise-canceling models go a step further by using circuitry (which requires batteries) that can reduce outside noise. All models below are recommended.

Sennheiser RS 180

Type	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
Standard	**PORTABLE**		
	Bowers & Wilkins P5	$300	80
	Klipsch Image X10i	350	80
	Klipsch Image S41	100	76
	Monster Beats by Dr. Dre Diddybeats	100	76
	Nixon Micro Blaster	100	76
	ClarityOne EB110	130	71
	JVC HA-FX300	60	71
	Bose IE2	100	66
	Bose MIE2	130	66
	Bose MIE2i	130	66
	Bose OE2	150	66
	Bowers & Wilkins C5	180	66
	Monster Turbine	80	66
	Phiaton Primal Series PS 210	80	66
	Sennheiser CX 215	40	66
	Sennheiser CX 300-II Precision	60	66
	Skullcandy Full Metal Jacket	70	66
	Sony DR-EX300iP	80	66
	Velodyne vPulse	90	65
	HOME/STUDIO		
	Grado Prestige SR80i	100	86
	HiFiMan HE-400	400	86
	Shure SRH1440	400	81
	Audio-Technica ATH-WS70 Solid Bass	120	76
	Bose AE2	150	76
	Bose AE2i	180	76
	Grado Prestige SR60i	80	76
	Philips Fidelio L1	300	76
	Yamaha HPH-200	150	76
	Skullcandy Roc Nation Aviator	150	71
	TDK ST800	120	71
	WIRELESS HOME/STUDIO		
	Sennheiser RS 180	330	80
Noise-canceling	**HOME/STUDIO**		
	Sony MDR-NC500D	400	78
	Bose QuietComfort 15	300	74
	PSB Speakers M4U 2	400	73
	Monster Beats by Dr. Dre Studio	300	71

Toshiba BDX5300

Blu-ray players

All the Blu-ray players we've tested can provide excellent HD picture quality from Blu-ray discs and can play standard DVDs and CDs. More new models can access online content, including streaming movies and TV programs from such services as Amazon, Hulu Plus, Netflix, and Vudu, and a growing number have built-in Wi-Fi for easy connection to home networks. Another trend: 3D capability. All models here are recommended.

Type	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
3D	**LG** BP620	$140	77
	Panasonic DMP-BDT220	115	75
	Samsung BD-E5900	130	75
	Toshiba BDX5300	110	73
	Panasonic DMP-BDT320	150	72
	Sony BPD-S590	150	71
	Panasonic DMP-BDT500	330	70
Standard	**LG** BP320	100	74
	Panasonic DMP-BD87	100	72
	LG BP220	80	71
	Samsung BD-E5300	80	69
	Toshiba BDX2300	80	69
	Panasonic DMP-BD77	80	68
	Philips BDP3406/F7	110	67
	Sony NSZ-GT1	300	67

Bose Lifestyle T20

Home-theater systems

Buying components can be costly and time-consuming. Home-theater-in-a-box systems can reduce the hassles by bundling all the components you'll need—a receiver, two to seven matched speakers, a subwoofer, and the wires—into a complete package. Many include an integrated Blu-ray player, which might have 3D capability and built-in Wi-Fi, plus access to online content such as streaming movies and TV programs from Amazon, Netflix and other services. Some models have wireless rear speakers. An even simpler option is a soundbar, which integrates several speakers into one enclosure that can be placed near the TV. All listed models are recommended.

Type	Brand & model	Price	Overall score
Without disc player	**Bose** Lifestyle T20	$1,800	76
	Denon DHT-1312BA	600	71
	Yamaha YHT-497BL	430	70
	Yamaha YHT-595	500	70
	Yamaha YHT-395	330	61
With Blu-ray player	**Samsung** HT-E6730W	800	74
	Samsung HT-D5500	380	67
	LG BH9420PW	700	66
	Harmon/Kardon BDS 770	1,100	65
Soundbars	**Vizio** VHT510	280	59
	Vizio VHT215	300	58
	Vizio VHT210	165	55

LCD & plasma TVs

New features put more entertainment at your fingertips

Today's TVs are more versatile than ever. Thanks to wireless connectivity, integrated Web browsers, and innovative remote controls, new LCD and plasma TVs make it easy to do things like streaming season one of "Homeland" and updating your Facebook status. You can even post tweets or check out online auctions on your TV.

We're happy to report that those new capabilities don't come at the expense of performance. Most TVs we've tested have excellent or very good high-definition picture quality and at least decent sound.

Many buyers shop by size, so we've made the Ratings easier to use by combining LCD and plasma TVs in one list, sorted by size, with a 3D score for those TVs that have it. If you want an LCD, check the scores for viewing angle and motion blur, concerns that don't affect plasma TVs.

News you need to know

Internet connectivity expands. Just a few years ago only high-priced TVs from the big names had Internet capability. Now even lower-priced sets from brands large and small—such as the $850 Vizio E552VLE, a 55-inch LCD set, and $300 Philips 26PFL4907, a 26-inch LCD—can access thousands of movies and TV shows from services such as Amazon Instant Video, Hulu Plus, Netflix, and Vudu. Many can also stream music from Pandora or Slacker and access sites such as eBay, Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, and YouTube.

That's not all. Taking a cue from smart phones and tablets, new smart TVs from LG, Panasonic, Samsung, Sony, and Vizio let you download free and paid apps, providing access to video games, travel and news programs, health and fitness tools, and more. A growing number of TVs have full browsers that take you almost anywhere on the Web rather than limiting you to a few video services, though the experience isn't as smooth as on a computer.

Convenience features emerge. We're seeing many more TV sets with Wi-Fi capability, a big plus in rooms where a wired Ethernet connection isn't handy. A number of new Web-enabled TVs have remotes with keyboards for entering text or passwords so that you don't have to painstakingly click your way around a virtual onscreen keyboard. A few sets, including some from Panasonic, have touchpads that make it easy to navigate menus. LG's Magic Remote, which works like a Nintendo Wii game controller, was one of the first to let you control a TV by pointing and clicking. With some Samsung TVs, you can control the set and navigate menus with voice commands or hand gestures.

Google TV gets a reboot. Google's platform for online video content didn't impress us when it came out two years ago. But now, like Charlie Sheen and Lindsay Lohan, it's getting a second chance. With updated software that lets you visit Google Play (formerly the Android apps market), Google TV is available on a line of TVs from LG and media players from Sony (NSZ-GS7, $199) and Vizio (Co-Star, $99). It still has a few bugs and limited content, but we really like its ability to search through live TV, Web-based services, and apps to find what you want. Look for more Google TV products soon.

3D hits mainstream models. More new TVs have the ability to display 3D as well as regular high-definition programming. That includes lower-priced sets such as the 51-inch Samsung PN51E490 plasma TV, which costs just $650. There's more 3D content available on Blu-ray discs, though TV service providers haven't yet delivered enough 3D programming to suit fans. Active-shutter glasses are lighter than earlier ones and cost as little as $20. Most passive 3D TVs come with several pairs of lightweight glasses similar to those you get at movie theaters.

Ratings on next page

What's next

Two new technologies—4K and OLED—could up the ante on TV performance. 4K sets have four times as many pixels as 1080p TVs, promising sharper detail. But the first sets, 84-inch LCDs, cost $20,000 and up, and there's little 4K content aside from photos. We're more excited about OLED TVs, which have the thin profiles of LCDs and the deep blacks, rich colors, and unlimited viewing angles of plasmas. Our guess is that a 55-incher will sell for $8,000 to $10,000. We expect the first OLED TVs any day now. Stay tuned.

FULLY LOADED
The Sony Bravia KDL-55HX850, $2,000, packs 3D capability, built-in Wi-Fi, and access to loads of online content, including streaming video from Amazon and Netflix.

PHOTO (TV SCREEN): JASON MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

B15 Vizio

Overview

All the LCD and plasma TVs in the Ratings (which include 3D sets) are recommended models with excellent or very good picture quality. Especially good values are marked CR Best Buys. The TVs highlighted below stand out for the reasons noted, but any recommended set is worth considering. (Some older TVs might be easier to find online than in retail stores.) If you plan to stream video, check out the online services a particular TV supports. Netflix is a given, but other services vary, including Amazon Instant Video, which might appeal to Amazon Prime subscribers. If a tested model isn't the size you want, check the last column to see whether a bigger or smaller screen is available.

60-INCH AND LARGER TVs

A1 Samsung $2,300
A2 Samsung $1,300 **CR Best Buy**
A4 Panasonic $1,700
A7 LG $1,250 **CR Best Buy**
A9 LG $1,000 **CR Best Buy**

Start with these models if you're looking for a jumbo-sized screen. In addition to fine picture quality, most have 3D capability, a full browser, Wi-Fi, and four or five streaming video services. **A1** and **A2** also have very good sound. **A1,** Samsung's flagship plasma, can be controlled using gestures and voice commands or a second touchpad remote. **A2** offers comparable performance but a few less features for a lot less money. **A4** has standout picture quality, and **A7** and **A9** are exceptional values.

55- TO 59-INCH TVs

B1 Panasonic $2,500
B2 Panasonic $1,300 **CR Best Buy**
B3 Sony $3,000
B4 Samsung $2,500
B9 Vizio $2,000
B13 Vizio $850 **CR Best Buy**
B15 Vizio $1,100 **CR Best Buy**

B1, B3, and **B4** are flagship models that are loaded with features. **B1** and **B4** come with a touchpad remote. **B4** can also be controlled using gestures and voice commands. **B9** is an extra-wide set—the first we've seen—that

Ratings LCD and plasma TVs

Recommended models only From 116 tested.

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Type	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Test results: Picture quality: High-def	3D performance	Viewing angle [1]	Motion blur	Sound quality	Features: Streaming video [2]	Wi-Fi	Full browser	Available screen sizes (tested size in bold)
A		**60-INCH AND LARGER** All have 1080p resolution.												
✔	1	**Samsung** PN60E8000	plasma	$2,300	79	●	◓	U	●	◓	B, C, H, N, V	•	•	64, **60**, 51
✔	2	**Samsung** PN60E550	plasma	1,300	78	●	◓	U	●	◓	B, C, H, N, V	•	•	64, **60**, 51
✔	3	**Panasonic** Viera TC-P60GT50	plasma	2,200	77	●	◓	U	●	○	A, C, H, N, V	•	•	65, **60**, 55, 50
✔	4	**Panasonic** Viera TC-P60ST50	plasma	1,700	77	●	◓	U	●	○	A, C, H, N, V	•	•	65, **60**, 55, 50
✔	5	**Samsung** UN60D6400	LCD	2,200	73	●	◒	M	○	○	B, C, H, N, V			**60**, 55, 46, 40
✔	6	**Samsung** PN64E550	plasma	2,000	71	◓	◓	U	●	◓	B, C, H, N, V	•	•	**64**, 60, 51
✔	7	**LG** 60PM6700	plasma	1,250	70	◓	◓	U	◓	○	C, H, N, V	•	•	**60**, 50
✔	8	**LG** 60PM9700	plasma	1,800	69	◓	◓	U	●	○	C, H, N, V	•	•	**60**, 50
✔	9	**LG** 60PA6500	plasma	1,000	67	●	-	U	◓	○				**60**, 50
✔	10	**Sharp** Aquos LC-60LE745U	LCD	1,600	66	◓	◒	N	○	○	C, H, N, V	•	•	70, **60**
✔	11	**Samsung** UN60ES6100	LCD	1,800	65	◓	-	N	◓	○	B, C, H, N, V	•	•	**60**, 55, 50, 46, 40
B		**55- TO 59-INCH** All have 1080p resolution.												
✔	1	**Panasonic** Viera TC-P55VT50	plasma	2,500	79	●	◓	U	●	◓	A, C, H, N, V	•	•	65, **55**
✔	2	**Panasonic** Viera TC-P55ST50	plasma	1,300	78	●	◓	U	●	○	A, C, H, N, V	•	•	65, 60, **55**, 50
✔	3	**Sony** Bravia XBR-55HX929	LCD	3,000	78	●	◓	N	●	○	A, H, N	•	•	65, **55**, 46
✔	4	**Samsung** UN55ES8000	LCD	2,500	74	◓	◓	M	◓	◓	C, H, N, V	•	•	75, 65, 60, **55**, 46
✔	5	**LG** 55LM6200	LCD	1,500	72	●	◓	W	◒	○	C, H, N, V	•	•	65, **55**, 47, 42
✔	6	**Sony** Bravia KDL-55HX850	LCD	2,000	72	●	◒	M	●	○	A, H, N	•	•	**55**, 46
✔	7	**Samsung** UN55ES6500	LCD	1,600	72	◓	◓	N	◓	◓	B, C, H, N, V	•	•	65, 60, **55**, 50, 46, 40, 32
✔	8	**LG** 55LM6700	LCD	1,600	71	◓	◓	W	◒	○	C, H, N, V	•	•	**55**, 47, 42
✔	9	**Vizio** XVT3D-580CM	LCD	2,000	70	●	○	N	◒	◓	A, H, N, V	•		**58**
✔	10	**Panasonic** Viera TC-L55ET5	LCD	1,400	67	◓	○	W	◓	◒	A, C, H, N, V	•	•	**55**, 47, 42
✔	11	**Samsung** UN55EH6000	LCD	1,200	66	●	-	M	○	○		•		65, 60, **55**, 50, 46, 40
✔	12	**Sony** Bravia KDL-55EX640	LCD	1,300	66	●	-	M	◓	○	A, C, H, N	•	•	**55,** 46, 40
✔	13	**Vizio** E552VLE	LCD	850	65	◓	-	W	○	◓	A, H, N, V	•		**55**, 47, 42
✔	14	**LG** 55G2	LCD	1,600	65	◓	◓	W	◒	○	A, N	•	•	**55**, 47
✔	15	**Vizio** M3D550SL	LCD	1,100	65	◓	◓	W	◒	○	A, H, N, V	•		**55**
C		**46- TO 51-INCH** All have 1080p resolution except C7 and C13, which have 720p.												
✔	1	**Samsung** PN51E6500	plasma	1,250	77	●	◓	U	●	◓	B, C, H, N, V	•	•	60, **51**
✔	2	**Panasonic** Viera TC-P50ST50	plasma	1,200	76	●	◓	U	●	○	A, C, H, N, V	•	•	65, 60, 55, **50**
✔	3	**Samsung** PN51E7000	plasma	1,400	76	●	◓	U	●	○	B, C, H, N, V	•	•	60, **51**
✔	4	**Samsung** PN51E550	plasma	850	74	●	◓	U	●	○	B, C, H, N, V	•	•	64, 60, **51**
✔	5	**LG** 47LM8600	LCD	1,700	74	●	◓	W	◓	○	C, H, N, V	•	•	55, **47**

PHOTO (TV SCREEN): JACK AFFLECK/GETTY IMAGES

Excellent
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor

CR Best Buy
Recommended

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Type	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Test results: Picture quality: High-def	3D performance	Viewing angle [1]	Motion blur	Sound quality	Features: Streaming video [2]	Wi-Fi	Full browser	Available screen sizes (tested size in bold)
C		**46- TO 51-INCH** continued												
✔	6	**LG** 47LM7600	LCD	$1,300	73	Excellent	Good	W	Very good	Good	C, H, N, V	•	•	55, **47**
✔	7	**Samsung** PN51E490	plasma	650	72	Very good	Very good	U	Excellent	Good		[3]		**51**
✔	8	**Samsung** UN46ES6500	LCD	1,100	72	Excellent	Good	M	Very good	Very good	C, H, N, V	•	•	65, 60, 55, 50, **46**, 40 32
✔	9	**Panasonic** Viera TC-L47ET5	LCD	1,000	72	Excellent	Very good	W	Very good	Good	A, C, H, N, V	•	•	55, **47**, 42
✔	10	**LG** 47LM6200	LCD	1,000	71	Very good	Very good	W	Fair	Good	C, H, N, V	•	•	65, 55, **47**, 42
✔	11	**Samsung** UN46ES6600	LCD	1,200	70	Very good	Good	N	Very good	Very good	B, C, H, N, V	•	•	60, 55, **46**
✔	12	**Sony** Bravia KDL-46HX750	LCD	1,100	69	Excellent	Good	M	Excellent	Good	A, H, N	•	•	55, **46**
✔	13	**Panasonic** Viera TC-P50XT50	plasma	800	69	Very good	Good	U	Excellent	Good	A, C, H, N, V	[3]		65, 60, 55, **50**
✔	14	**LG** 50PA6500	plasma	650	69	Excellent	-	U	Very good	Very good				60, **50**
✔	15	**Samsung** UN46EH5300	LCD	800	68	Excellent	-	M	Fair	Very good	B, C, H, N, V	•	•	50, **46**, 40, 32
✔	16	**Samsung** PN51E530	plasma	700	68	Excellent	-	U	Excellent	Good				60, **51**
✔	17	**Panasonic** Viera TC-L47DT50	LCD	1,500	68	Very good	Very good	W	Very good	Good	A, C, H, N, V	•	•	55, **47**
✔	18	**LG** 50PA5500	plasma	650	67	Excellent	-	U	Excellent	Good				60, **50**
✔	19	**LG** 47LS5700	LCD	900	66	Very good	-	W	Fair	Good	C, H, N, V	•	•	60, 55, **47**, 42
✔	20	**Panasonic** Viera TC-P50U50	plasma	700	66	Excellent	-	U	Excellent	Good				**50**
✔	21	**Samsung** UN46EH5000	LCD	730	65	Excellent	-	M	Fair	Good				50, **46**, 40, 37, 32
D		**40- TO 43-INCH** D1, D2, D5, and D8 have 1080p resolution; the rest have 720p.												
✔	1	**LG** 42LM6200	LCD	850	72	Very good	Very good	W	Fair	Good	C, H, N, V	•	•	65, 55, 47, **42**
✔	2	**Samsung** UN40ES6580	LCD	1,000	72	Excellent	Good	M	Very good	Very good	B, C, H, N, V	•	•	55, 50, 46, **40**
✔	3	**LG** 42PM4700	plasma	550	68	Very good	Good	U	Very good	Good	C, H, N, V	•	•	50, **42**
✔	4	**Samsung** PN43E450	plasma	430	68	Very good	-	U	Very good	Good				51, **43**
✔	5	**Samsung** UN40EH6000	LCD	650	67	Excellent	-	M	Good	Good				65, 60, 55, 50, 46, **40**
✔	6	**LG** 42PA4500	plasma	400	66	Very good	-	U	Very good	Very good				50, **42**
✔	7	**Panasonic** Viera TC-P42X5	plasma	400	65	Very good	-	U	Excellent	Good				50, **42**
✔	8	**Sony** Bravia KDL-40EX640	LCD	800	65	Excellent	-	M	Very good	Good	A, C, H, N	•	•	55, 46, **40**
E		**32-INCH** E1 has 720p resolution; E2 has 1080p.												
✔	1	**Samsung** UN32EH4000	LCD	330	66	Excellent	-	M	Fair	Good				**32**, 26
✔	2	**Samsung** UN32EH5000	LCD	350	66	Excellent	-	M	Fair	Good				50, 46, 40, 37, **32**
F		**27-INCH AND SMALLER** F1 has 720p resolution ; F2 has 1080p.												
✔	1	**Philips** 26PFL4907	LCD	300	56	Very good	-	M	Fair	Good	C, H, N, V	•		40, 32, **26**, 22
✔	2	**Toshiba** 24L4200U	LCD	250	55	Very good	-	N	Fair	Fair				32, **24**, 19

[1] U=unlimited, W=wide, M=moderate, N=narrow [2] A=Amazon, B=Blockbuster, C=CinemaNow, H=Hulu Plus, N=Netflix, V=Vudu.
[3] With optional adapter.

C2 Panasonic

can play most wide-screen movies without black bars. **B2** and **B15** are 3D sets with online access at a good price. **B13** doesn't have 3D, but it does have Wi-Fi and streaming services at a relatively low price.

46- TO 51-INCH TVs

C1 Samsung $1,250
C2 Panasonic $1,200
C3 Samsung $1,400
C4 Samsung $850
C5 LG $1,700
C13 Panasonic $800 **CR Best Buy**

C1, C2, C3, C4, and **C5** have excellent HD picture quality, very good 3D performance, Wi-Fi, and full browsers. **C5** has a gesture-based Magic Remote that you control by pointing it at the screen. The remote includes a built-in microphone for voice searches. **C1** has very good sound. Among the CR Best Buys in this size, **C13** stands out for having both 3D and streaming video, plus optional Wi-Fi capability, all at a low price.

40- TO 43-INCH TVs

D1 LG $850
D2 Samsung $1,000
D3 LG $550
D4 Samsung $430 **CR Best Buy**
D7 Panasonic $400 **CR Best Buy**

D1 and **D2** are full-featured LCD TVs with 3D and access to online content. **D1** has very good 3D performance and a wide viewing angle for an LCD. **D3** packs a lot of features for the price. **D4** and **D7,** plasma TVs with 720p resolution, are CR Best Buys that offer fine performance at a low price for the size.

32-INCH TVs

E1 Samsung $330
E2 Samsung $350

Both are fairly basic sets that offer solid performance at a good price. For the additional money, **E2** offers 1080p resolution.

WHICH TYPE OF TV FOR YOU?
Use your smart phone to download the RedLaser or ShopSavvy app and scan the code for our video.

PHOTO (TV SCREEN): MIKE POWELL/GETTY IMAGES

Cameras

More have longer zooms, thinner bodies, and smart-phone interfaces

THIS SEASON promises the biggest improvements to cameras in years. Responding to the challenge of smart phones, camera makers have boosted performance, added previously high-priced technologies to less costly models, and taken a cue from mobile devices by adding connectivity and friendlier user interfaces.

Trends you need to know

Our tests of more than 200 basic and advanced cameras, plus models we're now testing, highlight interesting trends.

Enhanced capabilities. Even basic models are ratcheting up how quickly they shoot stills and how well they capture video. Some, such as the Canon PowerShot S110, $450, can fire 8 to 10 frames per second at full resolution, a capability previously reserved for advanced cameras.

Because of improved in-camera processing, video frame and bit rates have increased, yielding smoother playback, even with action scenes. Most models now have convenient, dedicated video buttons.

Almost all basic models in the Ratings now have wide-angle capability (great for landscapes and group shots), which used to command a premium price. Fourteen can even shoot as wide as 24mm.

Another way camera makers are beefing up performance is by bringing pricey, pro-style capabilities down to consumer-priced advanced models. For example, the Nikon D600, $2,100 (body only), is one of the first consumer models to feature a larger, full-frame image sensor. On professional SLRs, such sensors have been known to produce great performance in low light and improved dynamic range.

Thinner, lighter, longer lenses. The recently introduced Canon PowerShot SX50 HS, $480, broke new ground with a 50x zoom, the longest of any basic model. Most superzooms offer 16x to 20x, but many are smaller, thinner, and lighter than previous models.

More connectivity. Three recommended Samsung models in our Ratings feature Wi-Fi: the WB850F superzoom and two SLR-likes, the NX20 and NX210. And the first Android-powered cameras have appeared, including Nikon's Coolpix S800c, $350, and Samsung's Galaxy camera. As with smart phones, they are able to download apps from stores.

Samsung has announced that the Galaxy camera will have 3G or 4G wireless data connectivity (depending on the version). The combination of apps and wireless connectivity would enable you to shoot still images or videos, edit them within the camera, and post them directly from the camera to an online service such as Instagram or Facebook without compromising image quality.

Better-performing rugged models. Almost all brands offer at least one such model. In the past, their image quality tended to be lower than for higher-ranked conventional ones. This year, performance rose for some rugged models, which are now grouped separately in the Ratings. Four had very good image quality for photos, and two had very good video quality.

Ratings Basic cameras

Recommended models only From 157 tested.

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Specifications: Megapixels	Weight (oz.)	Optical zoom	Widest angle (mm)	Battery life (shots)	Test results: Image quality	Flash photos	Video quality	Ease of use	LCD quality	Features: Touch screen	LCD size (in.)
	A	**SUBCOMPACT** For those who need a camera that fits in a purse or pocket.														
✔	1	**Nikon** Coolpix S100	$260	66	16	5	5x	28	150	◓	○	◓	○	○	•	3.4
✔	2	**Canon** PowerShot Elph 310 HS	260	65	12	5	8x	28	210	◓	◓	○	○	◓		3.0
✔	3	**Sony** Cyber-shot DSC-WX70	230	65	16	4	5x	25	240	◓	◓	◓	○	○	•	2.9
✔	4	**Canon** PowerShot S95	380	64	10	7	3.8x	28	200	◓	◓	◓	○	◓		3.0
✔	5	**Canon** PowerShot Elph 110 HS	230	62	16	5	5x	24	170	◓	○	◓	○	◓		3.0
✔	6	**Canon** PowerShot SD4000 IS Elph	230	62	10	6	3.8x	28	250	◓	◓	◓	○	◓		3.0
✔	7	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-3D1	400	62	12	7	4x	25	200	◓	○	◓	○	○	•	3.5
✔	8	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-SZ1	160	61	16	5	10x	25	250	◓	◓	○	◓	○		3.0
✔	9	**Nikon** Coolpix S8000	250	61	14	6	10x	30	210	◓	◓	◒	○	○		3.0
✔	10	**Canon** PowerShot Elph 300 HS	180	61	12	5	5x	24	220	◓	◓	◓	○	○		2.6
✔	11	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-FH8	130	61	16	4	5x	24	260	◓	○	◓	◓	○		3.0
✔	12	**Nikon** Coolpix S1200pj	430	61	14	7	5x	28	220	◓	○	○	○	○		3.0
	B	**RUGGED AND WATERPROOF** These models are claimed to resist moisture and withstand falls.														
✔	1	**Nikon** Coolpix AW100	280	62	16	7	5x	28	250	◓	○	○	◓	○		3.0
✔	2	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-TS4	320	62	12	7	4.6x	28	310	◓	○	○	◓	○		2.6
✔	3	**Canon** PowerShot D20	350	59	12	8	5x	28	280	○	○	○	○	○		3.0
✔	4	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-TS10	190	58	14	6	4x	35	300	◓	◓	○	○	◒		2.6
✔	5	**Olympus** Tough TG-1	400	58	12	8	4x	25	350	○	◓	○	○	○		3.0
✔	6	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-TS3	380	57	12	7	4.6x	28	310	○	◓	◓	○	○		2.6
✔	7	**Canon** PowerShot D10	260	57	12	8	3x	35	220	◓	◓	○	○	○		2.4
✔	8	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-TS20	150	56	16	5	4x	25	250	○	○	◒	◓	◒		2.6
✔	9	**Olympus** Tough TG-820	300	54	12	7	5x	28	220	○	○	○	○	○		2.9
✔	10	**Pentax** Optio WG-2	300	53	16	7	5x	28	260	○	○	○	○	○		2.9
✔	11	**Pentax** Optio WG-2 GPS	350	53	16	8	5x	28	260	○	○	○	○	○		2.9
✔	12	**Pentax** Optio WG-1	220	52	14	6	5x	28	260	○	○	○	○	○		2.6
✔	13	**Pentax** Optio WG-1 GPS	280	52	14	6	5x	28	260	○	○	○	○	○		2.6
✔	14	**Olympus** Tough TG-620	350	52	12	6	5x	28	220	○	○	◒	○	○		2.9
✔	15	**Sony** Cyber-shot DSC-TX20	300	51	16	5	4x	25	250	○	○	◓	○	○	•	2.9

B3 Canon

A3 Sony

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

☑ CR Best Buy
☑ Recommended

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Megapixels	Weight (oz.)	Optical zoom	Widest angle (mm)	Battery life (shots)	Image quality	Flash photos	Video quality	Ease of use	LCD quality	Touch screen	LCD size (in.)
C		**COMPACT** For those who want a simple camera with advanced features.														
☑	1	**Nikon** Coolpix P310	$280	66	16	7	4.2x	24	230	Very good	Very good	Good	Good	Good		3.0
☑	2	**Canon** PowerShot Elph 510 HS	230	64	12	7	12x	28	170	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	Very good	•	3.2
☑	3	**Nikon** Coolpix S8200	280	63	16	8	14x	25	250	Very good	Very good	Good	Good	Good		3.0
D		**SUPERZOOM** For those who need an extremely versatile zoom lens.														
☑	1	**Nikon** Coolpix S9100	200	67	12	8	18x	25	270	Very good	Very good	Very good	Good	Good		3.0
☑	2	**Nikon** Coolpix L120	280	66	14	17	21x	25	330	Very good	Very good	Good	Good	Very good		3.0
☑	3	**Olympus** SZ-31MR iHS	400	65	16	9	24x	25	NA	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	•	3.0
☑	4	**Fujifilm** FinePix F550EXR	230	65	16	8	15x	24	300	Very good	Very good	Good	Good	Very good		3.0
☑	5	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-ZS20	290	64	14	7	20x	24	260	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	•	3.0
☑	6	**Leica** V-Lux 40	700	64	14	7	20x	24	260	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	•	3.0
☑	7	**Canon** PowerShot SX240 HS	380	64	12	8	20x	25	230	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good		3.0
☑	8	**Canon** PowerShot SX260 HS	300	64	12	8	20x	25	230	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good		3.0
☑	9	**Sony** Cyber-shot DSC-HX9V	350	64	16	9	16x	24	300	Very good	Very good	Excellent	Good	Very good		3.0
☑	10	**Canon** PowerShot SX40 HS	380	64	12	23	35x	24	380	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	Good		2.6
☑	11	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-FZ47	300	63	12	18	24x	25	400	Good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good		2.9
☑	12	**Nikon** Coolpix L110	220	63	12	18	15x	28	270	Very good	Very good	Good	Good	Good		3.0
☑	13	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-ZS15	225	63	12	7	16x	24	260	Very good	Good	Good	Very good	Good		3.0
☑	14	**Nikon** Coolpix P100	420	63	10	18	26x	26	NA	Very good	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good		2.9
☑	15	**Fujifilm** FinePix F770EXR	330	62	16	8	20x	25	300	Very good	Good	Good	Very good	Good		3.0
☑	16	**Samsung** WB850F	350	62	16	9	21x	23	NA	Very good	Good	Good	Good	Good		3.0
☑	17	**Sony** Cyber-shot DSC-HX20V	400	62	18	9	20x	25	320	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	Good		3.0
☑	18	**Olympus** SZ-30MR	300	62	16	8	24x	25	NA	Very good	Very good	Good	Good	Good		3.0
☑	19	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-ZS8	230	62	14	7	16x	24	340	Very good	Good	Good	Very good	Good		3.0
☑	20	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-ZS10	220	61	14	8	16x	24	260	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	Good	•	3.0
☑	21	**Leica** V-Lux 30	750	61	14	8	16x	24	NA	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	Good	•	3.0

Ratings continued on next page

Overview

Image-quality scores for the basic cameras in the Ratings can't be compared with those of the advanced cameras, which we hold to a higher standard.

BEST VALUES IN SMALL CAMERAS

A1 Nikon $260
A2 Canon $260
A3 Sony $230
A11 Panasonic $130 **CR Best Buy**
C2 Canon $230

A1 has higher resolution and a larger LCD than most subcompacts, plus very good video quality and a touch screen. **A2** has a generous 8x zoom and very good LCD quality. **A3** is very lightweight, has a touch-screen display and shoots very good photos, flash shots, and video. It also has higher resolution than most subcompacts. **A11** is inexpensive and very lightweight, has longer battery life than most recommended subcompacts, and has very wide-angle capability. **C2** is very compact for a camera with a 12x zoom and has very good video and touch-screen LCD quality.

STANDOUT RUGGED CAMERAS

B1 Nikon $280
B2 Panasonic $320
B15 Sony $300

All are very good performers designed for travel and outdoor use, with a nontelescoping lens. They are claimed to meet industry shockproof and waterproof standards; we didn't test those claims. All but the Sony have built-in GPS. Nikon claims **B1** is waterproof to a depth of 33 feet and can withstand a drop of up to 5 feet. It's also designed to be easier to operate than most cameras when you wear gloves, as you might when skiing. Panasonic claims **B2** is waterproof to a depth of 39 feet and can withstand a drop of up to 6½ feet. Although **B15** has a little less zoom than most in its class, it has a touch-screen LCD, has wider-angle capability (25mm) than most, and can capture very good video, rare for a rugged model.

IF LONG ZOOM IS A PRIORITY

D5 Panasonic $290
D9 Sony $350

D5 is svelte, at just 1.4 inches thick, and lightweight for a model with a 20x zoom. Its touch-screen display makes it very easy to use. **D9** is one of the few superzooms that captures excellent video.

FIND THE RIGHT CAMERA TYPE
Use your smart phone to download the RedLaser or ShopSavvy app and scan the code for our video.

Overview

Image-quality scores in the Ratings aren't comparable with those for basic cameras. Prices include the lens listed. Without a lens, the camera usually costs $100 less. Except for C2, lenses for all SLR-like and SLR models have a maximum aperture of f/3.5. For more SLR lenses, see the Ratings on the facing page.

FOR FEATURES AND SMALL SIZE

A3 Sony $650

Although it doesn't have a long zoom lens, this Cyber-shot has very good image and video quality, a very good display and a higher resolution than most advanced models. It's also among the thinnest, lightest, and smallest advanced models in our Ratings.

BEST SMALL SLR-LIKE CAMERAS

B4 Nikon $800
B6 Sony $1,100
B7 Sony $600 **CR Best Buy**

Among the lightest in this class, **B4** has very good image and video quality, although the flash costs extra. **B6** has extraordinarily high resolution and very good performance across the board. **B7** also has very good performance and offers unusual automated modes, such as Auto Portrait Framing, which crops and resaves an image to potentially create a more pleasing composition.

FOR STANDOUT SLR PERFORMANCE

C1 Canon $1,050
C2 Olympus $1,600
C3 Nikon $1,100

C1 is one of a few advanced models with excellent image quality for low light and flash. It has a swiveling LCD and an excellent viewfinder. **C2** has a fast, f/2.8 lens. **C3** captures HD-resolution video (1080p) at up to 24 frames per second. It has stereo audio, two SD-card slots, auto-distortion control, and an excellent viewfinder.

BEST VALUE FOR SLR FLEXIBILITY

C4 Canon $700 **CR Best Buy**
C11 Nikon $500 **CR Best Buy**
C13 Pentax $850

C4 is excellent at minimizing camera shake and has a very good LCD and an excellent viewfinder. **C11** offers very good HD (1080i) video quality and fast response, and excellent quality for low-light photos. **C13** has an excellent viewfinder and is more resistant to moisture and dust than many consumer SLRs.

B4 Nikon

C1 Canon

C13 Pentax

Ratings Advanced cameras

Recommended models only From 59 tested.

CR Best Buy
Recommended

Excellent
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Specifications: Megapixels	Weight (oz.)	Test lens	Battery life (shots)	Test results: Image quality	Flash photos	Video quality	Ease of use	LCD quality	Viewfinder	Features: Image stabilizer*	Wi-Fi	LCD size (in.)
A POINT-AND-SHOOT For those who want a built-in lens but advanced features similar to an SLR.																	
CR Best Buy	1	**Canon** PowerShot G12	$ 450	66	10	15	28-140mm	370	Very good	Excellent	Very good	Good	Very good	Fair	L		2.8
CR Best Buy	2	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-FZ150	450	65	12	20	25-600mm	410	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	L		2.9
Recommended	3	**Sony** Cyber-shot DSC-RX100	650	65	20	9	28-100mm	330	Very good	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	NA	L		2.8
B SLR-LIKE For those who want a smaller, lighter camera with interchangeable lenses.																	
Recommended	1	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-GH2	900	72	16	23	14-42mm (2.0)	330	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Good	Excellent	L		2.9
Recommended	2	**Olympus** OM-D E-M5	1,300	70	16	25	12-50mm (2.0)	360	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	B		3.0
Recommended	3	**Samsung** NX20	1,100	69	20	23	18-55mm (1.5)	360	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good	Very good	L	•	2.9
Recommended	4	**Nikon** 1 V1	800	69	10	19	10-30mm (2.7)	400	Very good	NA	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	L		2.8
Recommended	5	**Sony** SLT-A65VK	1,000	68	24	31	18-55mm (1.5)	560	Good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	B		2.8
Recommended	6	**Sony** NEX-7K	1,100	67	24	20	18-55mm (1.5)	430	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	L		2.9
CR Best Buy	7	**Sony** SLT-A37K	600	67	16	27	18-55mm (1.5)	500	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Fair	Very good	B		2.6
Recommended	8	**Sony** SLT-A77V	1,400	67	24	36	18-55mm (1.5)	530	Good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	B		2.8
CR Best Buy	9	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-G3K	575	67	16	20	14-42mm (2.0)	270	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	L		2.9
Recommended	10	**Samsung** NX200	900	66	20	19	18-55mm (1.5)	320	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	NA	L		2.9
Recommended	11	**Panasonic** Lumix DMC-GF5X	750	65	12	14	14-42mm (2.0)	330	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good	NA	L		2.9
Recommended	12	**Samsung** NX210	900	65	20	19	18-55mm (1.5)	320	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good	NA	L	•	2.9
C SLR For those who want advanced features and performance, with interchangeable lenses.																	
Recommended	1	**Canon** EOS 60D	1,050	74	18	36	18-55mm (1.6)	320	Very good	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	L		3.0
Recommended	2	**Olympus** E-5	1,600	73	12	49	14-54mm (2.0)	870	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Good	Excellent	B		3.0
Recommended	3	**Nikon** D7000	1,100	72	16	44	18-105mm (1.5)	1050	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	L		2.8
CR Best Buy	4	**Canon** EOS Rebel T3i	700	72	18	29	18-55mm (1.6)	180	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	L		3.0
Recommended	5	**Canon** EOS 7D Digital	1,850	72	18	50	18-135mm (1.6)	220	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	L		2.8
Recommended	6	**Sony** DSLR-A580L	900	71	16	33	18-55mm (1.5)	560	Very good	Very good	Excellent	Very good	Good	Very good	B		2.9
Recommended	7	**Canon** EOS Rebel T4i	950	71	18	29	18-55mm (1.6)	180	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	Very good	L		3.0
CR Best Buy	8	**Canon** EOS Rebel T3	500	70	12	26	18-55mm (1.6)	220	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Good	Excellent	L		2.6
CR Best Buy	9	**Canon** EOS Rebel T2i	650	70	18	28	18-55mm (1.6)	180	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good	Very good	L		3.0
CR Best Buy	10	**Nikon** D3200	700	68	24	29	18-55mm (1.5)	540	Very good	Good	Good	Very good	Very good	Very good	L		2.8
CR Best Buy	11	**Nikon** D3100	500	68	14	29	18-55mm (1.5)	550	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	L		2.8
Recommended	12	**Pentax** K-5	1,250	67	16	36	18-55mm (1.5)	740	Very good	Good	Good	Very good	Good	Very good	B		2.8
Recommended	13	**Pentax** K-30	850	67	16	33	18-55mm (1.5)	410	Very good	Good	Good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	B		2.8
CR Best Buy	14	**Nikon** D5100	700	67	16	31	18-55mm (1.5)	660	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	L		2.8
CR Best Buy	15	**Pentax** K-r	650	67	12	30	18-55mm (1.5)	470	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	Very good	B		2.8
CR Best Buy	16	**Sony** DSLR-A560L	650	67	14	33	18-55mm (1.5)	560	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	Very good	B		2.8
CR Best Buy	17	**Nikon** D5000	650	65	12	33	18-55mm (1.5)	510	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	L		2.6

*B = body-based. L = lens-based.

Going for better glass: Step-up SLR lenses

Lenses for digital SLRs have gotten lighter and easier to use, and those with the stabilizer in the lens instead of the camera offer better image stabilization.

The kit lenses listed in the camera Ratings on the facing page offer many of those benefits. For routine shooting, they might be a bargain because they're often discounted from their normal retail price to about $100 when you buy them with the camera. But to take full advantage of your SLR's versatility, consider the step-up lenses below, which offer two major advantages over a kit lens:

Greater zoom. Instead of the 3.1x zoom (18- to 55-mm) you usually get with a kit lens, so-called telezoom lenses offer 5x to 8x, and superzooms can offer up to 14x. Some step-ups offer wide-angle settings as low as 15mm, handy for shooting landscapes or group portraits, or telephoto settings as high as 250mm for close-ups of distant subjects.

Wider apertures. All of the standard zooms have a maximum aperture of f/2.8, compared with f/3.5 for all but one kit lens on the facing page. That difference lets you use faster shutter speeds and lower ISO settings (especially in low light) and provides shallower depth of field for more professional-looking photos.

A1 Nikon

A2 Canon

Ratings SLR lenses

Recommended models only From 15 tested.

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

- CR Best Buy
- Recommended

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model (focal range)	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Test results: Image quality	Test results: Ease of use	Test results: Image stabilization	Specifications: Zoom	Specifications: Weight (oz.)	Specifications: Maximum aperture
A		**STANDARD ZOOM** For those who need a lens for everyday use.								
✔	1	**Nikon** ED-IF AF-S DX Nikkor Zoom Lens (17-55mm)	$1,400	78	Excellent	Very good	Very good	3X	26.6	f/2.8
✔	2	**Canon** EF-S IS USM (17-55mm)	1,000	74	Very good	Excellent	Excellent	3X	22.8	f/2.8
✔	3	**Tamron** SP AF XR Di-II VC LD Aspherical (IF) Lens (Nikon Mount) (17-50mm)	650	72	Very good	Good	Excellent	3X	20.1	f/2.8
✔	4	**Sigma** EX DC OS HSM (Nikon Mount) (17-50mm)	980	71	Very good	Good	Excellent	3X	19.9	f/2.8
✔	5	**Sigma** DC Macro OS HSM (Nikon Mount) (17-70mm)	690	71	Very good	Good	Excellent	4X	18.9	f/2.8-4
✔	6	**Tamron** SP AF XR Di-II VC LD Aspherical (IF) Lens (Canon Mount) (17-50mm)	650	69	Very good	Very good	Excellent	3X	20.1	f/2.8
✔	7	**Sigma** EX DC OS HSM (Canon Mount) (17-50mm)	980	69	Very good	Very good	Excellent	3X	19.9	f/2.8
B		**TELEZOOM** For those who need to get close to their subjects for sports or nature photography.								
✔	1	**Canon** EF-S IS USM (15-85mm)	700	76	Very good	Excellent	Excellent	6X	20.3	f/3.5-5.6
✔	2	**Canon** EF-S IS STM (18-135mm)	550	74	Very good	Excellent	Excellent	8X	16.9	f/3.5-5.6
✔	3	**Nikon** AF-S DX Nikkor G ED VR (16-85mm)	700	74	Very good	Very good	Excellent	5X	17.1	f/3.5-5.6
✔	4	**Canon** EF-S IS II (55-250mm)	300	71	Very good	Very good	Excellent	5X	13.8	f/4-5.6
C		**SUPERZOOM** For those who need the greatest possible zoom range, from wide angle to telephoto.								
✔	1	**Sigma** DC Macro OS HSM (18-250mm)	800	72	Very good	Very good	Excellent	14X	16.6	f/3.5-6.3
✔	2	**Sigma** DC OS HSM (18-200mm)	500	72	Very good	Very good	Excellent	11X	21.5	f/3.5-6.3

Overview

Image-quality scores for SLR lenses aren't comparable with those for basic or advanced cameras. Most rated lenses are very good. Tests were conducted in partnership with International Consumer Research & Testing, a worldwide association of 40 consumer organizations of which Consumer Reports is a member.

BEST CANON LENSES

A2 Canon $1,000
B4 Canon $300 **CR Best Buy**

Both offer very good image quality, are excellent at limiting the effects of geometric distortion and have an excellent image stabilizer. **A2** is a standard zoom that is very easy to use. **B4** is a telezoom lens that allows you to get closer to your subject than a standard zoom, although it doesn't have wide-angle capability. But both have a greater tendency to produce lens flare (reflected light caught between surfaces of lens elements and the inside barrel of the lens) than the others.

BEST NIKON LENSES

A1 Nikon $1,400
B3 Nikon $700

Both are excellent at limiting the effects of geometric distortion. **A1** is the only standard zoom lens in the Ratings with excellent image quality. **B3** is a telezoom that gives you more telephoto zoom than most standard lenses. It has an excellent image stabilizer but might produce a bit more lens flare than the others.

BEST SUPERZOOM LENSES FOR CANON

C1 Sigma $800
C2 Sigma $500

Both have very good performance and image quality and an excellent image stabilizer. Separate versions of the lenses are available for other SLR brands, but we haven't tested them yet.

BEST LENSES FOR OLYMPUS, PENTAX, AND SONY

The following previously tested, recommended lenses are compatible with Olympus, Pentax, and Sony lens mounts: Olympus Zuiko Digital 14- to 54-mm f/2.8-3.5 II, $600; Olympus Zuiko Digital 14- to 42-mm f/3.5-5.6, $220; Olympus Zuiko Digital 14- to 45-mm f/3.5-5.6, $550; Olympus Zuiko Digital 40- to 150-mm f/4-5.6, $300; Olympus Zuiko Digital 18- to 180-mm f/3.5-6.3, $500; Pentax smc-DA 18- to 55-mm f/3.5-5.6 AL II, $200; Sony SAL-1870 18- to 70-mm f/3.5-5.6 DT, $200; Sony DT 55- to 200-mm f/4-5.6, $200.

Printers

Inkjet vs. laser, and more

SO MUCH FOR the paperless home office; the Ratings include more recommended models in more categories than ever. Here are some pointers on finding the best performing, most cost-effective printer:

Black and white is faster and cheaper. If you print mostly text, a black-and-white all-in-one—which also copies and scans documents—will usually save you time and money. Most black-and-white lasers churned out 12 or more pages of excellent text for roughly 2 to 4 cents per page. But only one color inkjet, the Lexmark Office Edge Pro 4000, could do that. The other color inkjets typically churned out 6 to 9 pages of very good text per minute, often for more than 4 cents per page. Black-and-white regular laser printers were similarly speedier than color lasers at printing black text, but there was little difference in text quality or cost per page.

Lasers ace text and color graphics. Color lasers print higher quality black text and color graphics than inkjets. And they do so without sacrificing speed or economy. But they don't print especially good photos on high-quality paper.

For photos, flexibility has its price. Regular inkjets are far more versatile than snapshot printers. They can print photos in a wide variety of sizes, plus text and other content, and some can be connected to a home network. Snapshot printers are faster and produce 4x6s for just 25 cents (for inkjets, they cost about 50 cents).

Mobile printing: There's an app for that. Nearly all the inkjet all-in-ones can print from a tablet or smart phone via a home wireless network, using the printer maker's app from either Apple's App Store or Google's Play Store. This feature isn't as common for other types of printers, but some do offer it. Some all-in-ones and regular models can print a photo or document you e-mail directly to them from any device.

SEE OUR BUYING GUIDE VIDEO
Use your smart phone to download the RedLaser or ShopSavvy app and scan the code for the video.

A2 Lexmark

B1 Dell

Ratings

All tested models In performance order.

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Monthly cost	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Test results: Photo quality	Photo speed 4x6	Text quality	Text speed	Features: Ethernet	Wi-Fi	Built-in fax	LCD viewer size (diagonal, in.)
	A	**ALL-IN-ONE INKJETS** Best if you need to print photos and documents in color as well as copy or scan.											
✔	1	**Canon** Pixma MG8220	$150	$11.40	72	◓	◓	○	◓	•	•		3.3
✔	2	**Lexmark** OfficeEdge Pro 4000	250	5.90	72	◓	●	●	●	•	•	•	1.8
✔	3	**Canon** Pixma MG6120	180	11.20	72	●	●	○	●	•	•		3.0
✔	4	**Lexmark** Pro 915	200	12.40	72	◓	●	◓	◓	•	•	•	3.1
✔	5	**HP** Photosmart 7510	150	9.20	71	◓	◓	●	◓		•		2.5
✔	6	**HP** Officejet Pro 8600 Plus	230	5.30	71	◓	●	◓	●	•	•	•	3.8
✔	7	**Brother** MFC-J825DW	150	7.30	70	◓	●	○	◓	•	•	•	1.9
✔	8	**Brother** MFC-J6910DW	300	7.90	70	◓	◓	○	◓	•	•	•	1.9
✔	9	**Lexmark** Pro 715	140	12.20	70	◓	●	◓	◓	•	•	•	NA
✔	10	**HP** Photosmart 6510	150	9.90	70	◓	●	●	◓		•		3.2
✔	11	**Canon** Pixma MG6220	150	10.90	70	●	●	○	◓	•	•		2.8
✔	12	**Brother** MFC-J5910DW	150	7.70	70	◓	◓	○	◓	•	•	•	1.1
✔	13	**HP** Photosmart 5510	100	9.10	70	◓	●	●	◓		•		2.2
✔	14	**Canon** Pixma MX892	150	12.40	70	◓	●	◓	◓	•	•	•	2.8
✔	15	**Canon** Pixma MX512	150	10.30	70	◓	◓	◓	◓	•	•	•	2.5
	16	**Lexmark** Genesis S815	200	11.00	69	◓	●	◓	◓		•	•	3.0
	17	**Dell** V525w	130	12.70	69	◓	●	◓	◓		•	•	NA
	18	**HP** Officejet 6600	150	6.50	68	◓	◓	◓	●		•	•	2.8
	19	**Brother** MFC-J625DW	130	7.30	68	◓	◓	○	◓		•	•	1.0
	20	**HP** Officejet Pro 8600	200	5.00	68	◓	●	◓	◓	•	•	•	2.8
	21	**HP** Officejet 4620	100	7.50	68	◓	◓	◓	◓		•	•	NA
	22	**HP** Officejet 7500A	250	7.90	68	◓	●	◓	◓	•	•	•	2.2
	23	**Canon** Pixma MX882	200	11.30	68	◓	●	◓	◓	•	•	•	2.8
	24	**Epson** Workforce Pro WP-4540	280	7.80	68	◓	◓	◓	●	•	•	•	NA
	25	**Epson** Workforce 845	200	8.70	68	○	◓	◓	●	•	•	•	3.4

C5 Brother

D1 Epson

Excellent
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor

CR Best Buy
Recommended

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Monthly cost	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Test results: Photo quality	Photo speed 4x6	Text quality	Text speed	Features: Ethernet	Wi-Fi	Built-in fax	LCD viewer size (diagonal, in.)
A		**ALL-IN-ONE INKJETS** continued											
	26	**Canon** Pixma MX712	$150	$12.00	67	○	◉	◉	◓	•	•	•	2.6
	27	**Kodak** HERO 9.1	150	6.70	67	◓	◉	◓	◓	•	•	•	3.3
	28	**Epson** Artisan 837	300	11.60	67	◓	◓	○	◓	•	•	•	3.5
	29	**Canon** Pixma MX432	90	10.50	66	◓	◓	◓	◓		•	•	NA
	30	**Canon** Pixma MG5320	100	12.00	66	◓	◉	○	◓		•		2.8
	31	**Epson** Artisan 730	280	11.70	66	◓	◓	○	◓	•	•		2.4
	32	**Kodak** HERO 5.1	130	8.40	66	◓	◉	◓	◓		•		2.2
	33	**Epson** Workforce WF-7510	180	8.20	66	○	◓	◓	◉	•	•	•	2.4
	34	**Dell** V725W	120	12.20	66	◒	◉	◉	◓	•	•	•	1.8
	35	**Epson** Artisan 835	300	10.70	66	◓	◓	○	◓	•	•	•	3.4
	36	**HP** Officejet 6700 Premium	170	6.40	65	◓	◓	◒	◉	•	•	•	NA
	37	**Kodak** OFFICE HERO 6.1	150	6.70	65	◓	◉	◓	○	•	•	•	2.4
	38	**Canon** Pixma MX420	140	11.20	65	◓	◓	◓	◓	•	•	•	2.3
	39	**Canon** Pixma MG4120	130	10.70	65	◓	◓	○	◓	•	•		2.4
	40	**Canon** PIXMA MG3120	80	8.60	65	◓	◓	○	◓		•		NA
	41	**Canon** Pixma MX372	80	10.50	65	◓	◓	◓	◓			•	NA
	42	**Canon** Pixma MP280	70	11.20	64	◓	◓	◓	◓				NA
	43	**Canon** Pixma MP495	80	11.30	64	◓	◓	◓	◓		•		NA
	44	**Kodak** ESP 3.2	70	8.40	64	◓	◓	○	◓		•		2.4
	45	**Canon** Pixma MG2120	60	8.60	64	◓	◓	○	◓				NA
	46	**HP** Envy 110	250	9.60	64	◓	◓	◉	◓		•		2.0
	47	**Brother** MFC-J6510DW	230	7.90	63	◉	○	○	◓	•	•	•	1.7
	48	**Brother** MFC-J430W	100	7.30	63	◉	◉	◓	◓		•	•	NA
	49	**Epson** Expression Home XP-400	100	13.00	62	○	◒	○	◓		•		2.4
	50	**Epson** Workforce 435	100	10.60	62	◓	◒	◓	◓		•	•	NA
	51	**HP** Deskjet 3050	80	12.60	61	◉	◓	○	◓		•		NA
	52	**HP** Envy 114	250	9.30	60	○	◓	◓	◓		•		1.9
	53	**Brother** MFC-J220	90	11.10	59	◓	○	◓	◒			•	2.0

Ratings continued on next page

Overview

Consider price and operating cost. A low-priced model could be expensive in the long run if it's not very frugal with paper and ink. The copying function of an all-in-one is fine for casual use. Most are very good for scanning.

FOR PRINTING, COPYING, AND SCANNING IN COLOR

A2 **Lexmark** $250
A6 **HP** $230
A7 **Brother** $150

A2 and **A6** are fast and economical to use. **A2** has a 1.8-inch LCD; **A6** has a large, 3.8-inch LCD. **A7** is low-priced and economical to use, but has a 1.9-inch LCD.

FOR PRINTING, COPYING, AND SCANNING IN BLACK AND WHITE

C5 **Brother** $200 **CR Best Buy**
C9 **Brother** $160 **CR Best Buy**

Both are low-priced, print more than 14 pages of excellent text per minute, and have excellent scanning and copying. **C5** has a built-in fax.

FOR PRINTING TEXT CHEAPLY AND QUICKLY

F7 **Brother** $150
F8 **Samsung** $70 **CR Best Buy**

Both are low-priced. **F7** is very economical to use.

FOR PRINTING COLOR PHOTOS, INCLUDING ENLARGEMENTS

D1 **Epson** $150 **CR Best Buy**
D3 **HP** $100 **CR Best Buy**

D1 prints very good photos and text, and has excellent speed. **D3** has a low price and is very economical to use. It also has excellent text speed.

FOR PRINTING COLOR DOCUMENTS

B1 **Dell** $450
E2 **Lexmark** $200

B1 can print at least 13 pages of excellent text (black-and-white or color) per minute, produces excellent graphics, and can scan, copy, and fax. But it's expensive and costly to operate. **E2** prints at least 11 pages of excellent text (black-and-white or color) per minute, produces excellent graphics, and is economical to use for a color laser.

FOR PRINTING SNAPSHOTS

The Epson PictureMate Show PM300, $300, and Epson PictureMate Charm PM225, $200, which are not in the Ratings, print 4x6s inexpensively in less than 1 minute. Both are recommended.

5 ways to save on your inkjet

Inkjet printers are more costly to use than black-and-white laser models. That's mainly due to the cost of ink cartridges, which can easily run two or three times a printer's purchase price over the printer's life. Here are five ways to reduce the cost of ink:

Recycle cartridges. Office chains Office Depot, OfficeMax, and Staples each offer $2 in store credit for each ink (or laser toner) cartridge you drop off, up to 10 per month. To qualify, you must join their rewards clubs and the cartridge must be for a brand that they accept.

Use draft mode. In tests we conducted of five major-brand printers, using a lower-quality draft mode (some brands call it "fast" or "quick print") to print non-photographic content cut ink usage by half and increased print speed by as much as 100 percent. Print quality was worse, but on most models the quality of black text was still acceptable. Switching to draft mode made the printers noisier, and on many models it can take a few steps to perform, but if you print many text documents, or long ones, it might be worth trying.

Don't always heed the warnings. A low-ink warning doesn't always mean you must replace an ink cartridge immediately. In some cases you can print up to 20 percent more after it appears. In doing so, though, make sure to follow any relevant advice in the printer's user manual.

Print fewer pages. You can save considerable ink (and paper) by printing multiple pages on each sheet, with each page being reduced in size. Many printers have this feature. It is especially useful when printing long documents, such as manuals or PowerPoint presentations.

Avoid needless pages. Before printing maps or other Web content, preview them to avoid blank pages or unwanted ads. Or use a free, advertising-supported program called GreenPrint (*printgreener.com*) to help you skip pages with little or no content.

DID YOU KNOW?

E E E

Font matters

In our tests, we printed 27 percent more pages with a black-ink cartridge using 12-point Times New Roman, above at left, and 23 percent more using 12-point Calibri, center, than we did with Arial, right, in the same size.

D3 HP

F1 Hp

Ratings Printers

Recommended models only From 58 tested.

Excellent
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor

CR Best Buy
Recommended

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Monthly cost	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Test results: Photo quality	Test results: Photo speed 4x6	Test results: Text quality	Test results: Text speed	Features: Ethernet	Features: Wi-Fi	Features: Built-in fax	Features: LCD viewer size (diagonal, in.)
	B	**ALL-IN-ONE COLOR LASER** Best if you need to print lots of color documents and also copy or scan.											
✔	1	**Dell** 2155cn	$450	$12.10	71	○	*	●	●	•		•	NA
	C	**ALL-IN-ONE BLACK-AND-WHITE LASERS** Best if you need to print and copy in black-and-white.											
✔	1	**Samsung** SCX-3405FW	200	5.80	76	NA	NA	●	●	•	•	•	NA
✔	2	**Canon** imageCLASS MF5950dw	400	3.70	76	NA	NA	●	●	•	•	•	NA
✔	3	**HP** LaserJet Pro 400 MFP M425dn	500	2.70	76	NA	NA	●	●	•		•	NA
✔	4	**Dell** 2355dn	550	2.30	75	NA	NA	●	●	•		•	NA
✔	5	**Brother** MFC-7360N	200	2.70	74	NA	NA	●	●	•		•	NA
✔	6	**HP** LaserJet Pro M1212nf	210	5.50	74	NA	NA	●	●	•			NA
✔	7	**Brother** MFC-7460DN	250	2.90	74	NA	NA	●	●	•		•	NA
✔	8	**HP** LaserJet Pro M1217nfw	250	6.10	73	NA	NA	●	●	•	•	•	NA
✔	9	**Brother** DCP-7060D	160	2.90	72	NA	NA	●	●				NA
✔	10	**Brother** MFC-7860DW	300	2.70	72	NA	NA	◓	●	•	•	•	NA
	D	**REGULAR INKJETS** Best if you need to print high-quality photos.											
✔	1	**Epson** Workforce Pro WP-4010	150	7.70	70	◓	●	◓	●	•		NA	NA
✔	2	**Epson** Stylus R2000	600	10.70	69	●	●	◓	●	•	•	NA	NA
✔	3	**HP** Officejet 6100	100	6.20	69	◓	◓	◓	●	•	•	NA	NA
✔	4	**HP** Officejet 6000 Wireless	120	8.00	68	◓	◓	◓	◓	•	•	NA	NA
✔	5	**Canon** Pixma Pro9000 Mark II	500	11.80	65	◓	◓	●	◒			NA	NA
✔	6	**Canon** Pixma iX6520	200	11.70	65	◓	●	◓	●			NA	NA
✔	7	**HP** OfficeJet Pro 8100	150	5.00	65	○	◓	◓	●	•	•	NA	NA
✔	8	**Canon** Pixma iP4920	90	11.80	65	◓	●	○	●			NA	NA
	E	**REGULAR COLOR LASERS** Best if you need to print mostly color documents.											
✔	1	**Dell** 1250c	150	13.30	70	◓	*	◓	◓			NA	NA
✔	2	**Lexmark** C540n	200	7.00	67	○	*	●	●	•		NA	NA
	F	**REGULAR BLACK-AND-WHITE LASERS** Best if you need to print only black-and-white documents.											
✔	1	**HP** LaserJet Pro P1606dn	200	5.00	78	NA	NA	●	●	•		NA	NA
✔	2	**HP** LaserJet Pro P1102w	180	5.80	78	NA	NA	●	●		•	NA	NA
✔	3	**HP** LaserJet Pro 400 M401dw	350	2.70	77	NA	NA	●	●	•	•	NA	NA
✔	4	**Samsung** ML-2955DW	150	4.60	75	NA	NA	●	●	•	•	NA	NA
✔	5	**Brother** HL-5370DW	200	1.50	74	NA	NA	●	●	•	•	NA	NA
✔	6	**Lexmark** E260dn	150	6.60	74	NA	NA	●	●	•		NA	NA
✔	7	**Brother** HL-2270DW	150	2.70	73	NA	NA	●	●	•	•	NA	NA
✔	8	**Samsung** ML-2165W	70	5.60	73	NA	NA	●	●		•	NA	NA
✔	9	**Dell** 1130n	130	5.50	72	NA	NA	●	●	•		NA	NA

*Can't print on 4x6 paper

Smart phones

They're bigger, faster, and better than ever

A **NEW SMART PHONE** might not be the best festive offering, unless you also plan to cover some or all of the gadget's hefty monthly bills. Yet phone sales are sure to surge this holiday season, thanks in part to people treating themselves to the new iPhone 5 or another of the recommended phones in the Ratings on page 48.

Look for these trends

Here's what's new in phone shape, size, connectivity, and more.

Screens are bigger and less square. The iPhone 5 finally brought Apple into the fold of 4-inch and larger screens. Most top-rated smart phones now have screens measuring upward of 4.3 inches diagonally, providing extra real estate for viewing Web pages, maps, and more.

Further, more of those screens than ever have high-definition 720p resolution for easier viewing and reading of Web pages and e-mail. And some models, including the iPhone 5, have a screen with a rectangular, 16:9 aspect ratio that's well-suited for viewing videos in landscape mode.

Designers haven't forgotten about usability, though. Many models are less than a half-inch thick and ultralight—5 ounces or less—so they're comfortable to hold and slide easily in and out of most pockets.

But a few phones with 5-inch-plus screens, including the Samsung Note, may be too big for many hands and pockets. They do, though, offer a middle ground between phones and tablets, and offer extras such as a stylus to handwrite notes, draw pictures, or play games.

Look beyond Apple and Samsung. However justified the buzz around Apple and Samsung phones, don't overlook the best models from other makers. In addition to fine performance, as detailed in the Ratings, they offer innovations. Verizon's Motorola Razr phones, for example, have some nifty apps that will automatically change their settings according to the time of day, your activity, or your location. And HTC's One Series phones have superbly intuitive interfaces that allow you to access core features quickly.

4G is now the norm. With the exception of Apple's iPhone 4S on Verizon and Sprint, every recommended phone connects to a high-speed fourth-generation data network. Phones can use more juice when running on 4G, so manufacturers have compensated with higher-capacity batteries and more sophisticated power management. Some 4G phones let you switch to a slower-speed network to conserve power.

HIGH FIVE The iPhone 5 performed superbly in our tests. It's Apple's best phone yet.

One caution: A faster 4G connection may encourage you to consume more data, which might drive up your monthly bills.

Ratings on next page

New Windows Phone 8 operating system packs new features

It's new to tablets and computers, but the tiled interface of Microsoft's just-launched Windows 8 operating system will be familiar to owners of Windows Phone 7 smart phones.

Windows Phone 8, however, gives the tiles some new tricks. You can vary their size and shape, or program them to allow one-tap access to a friend's latest e-mails, texts, and social-media posts. The new operating system also gives Windows phones a free built-in navigation app with spoken, turn-by-turn directions.

The new Windows phones, in turn, promise to bring to Microsoft's platform the top-notch performance and features previously found only on phones that run on the Android or Apple iOS operating systems. Here are two of the first, and highly anticipated, models, expected before the end of this year.

Nokia Lumia 920

This phone has a 4.5-inch high-definition display and an advanced 8.7-megapixel camera that allows you to add animation to still images and to edit out people—remove the tourists, say, from a shot of the Eiffel Tower. Also, the screen responds to even a gloved finger and the battery can be charged wirelessly, using induction.

HTC Windows Phone 8X

Equipped with a 4.3-inch, high-definition display, this model also has an advanced ultra-wide-angle front camera, which HTC says can capture three times the area of most other front cameras. Other innovations: a built-in audio amplifier designed to improve sound quality for listening to music.

Overview

While our Ratings group phones by carrier, we've highlighted the recommended phones below by other considerations. For phones that come in 16GB and 32GB capacities, the price is for the storage size we tested. Prices are for a two-year contract, including rebates. (Carriers are listed in order of user satisfaction.)

BIG-SCREEN, BIG PERFORMANCE

A2 **Samsung** Galaxy S III (Verizon, 32GB) $250
B1 **Samsung** Galaxy S III (Sprint, 16GB) $200
B3 **HTC** Evo 4G LTE (Sprint) $200
D1 **Samsung** Galaxy S III (AT&T, 16GB) $200

These phones deftly combine a superb screen that's big (4.7 inches for **B3,** 4.8 inches for the rest) but not enormous, with top-notch performance and some of the most innovative technologies on the Android platform. All allow you to launch the camera or messaging from a locked screen, which is handy. They also have cameras with advanced features, including the ability to snap a still while continuing to shoot a video, and take very good photos (except for **B3,** whose photos are only fair). The Samsungs **(A2, B1, D1)** have front-facing cameras that monitor your eyes while you're reading a Web page or other document to prevent the screen from timing out; let you minimize a video playing on the phone's large screen so that you can perform other tasks, such as browse the Web or reply to e-mail; and offer myriad options for wirelessly sharing their content with other devices.

COMPACT HIGH PERFORMERS

A3 **Apple** iPhone 5 (Verizon, 16GB) $200
B2 **Apple** iPhone 5 (Sprint, 16GB) $200
D2 **Apple** iPhone 5 (AT&T, 16GB) $200
A4 **Motorola** Droid Razr M (Verizon, $100)
C2 **HTC** One S (T-Mobile, $0)

These are ideal choices if you want top performance in a smaller package. **A4** and **C2** have high-resolution, 4.3-inch screens; the iPhone 5 **(A3, B2, D2)** has a 4-inch display. The free new Apple Maps app, for iPhone 5 and other iPhones using iOS6, gives clear guidance in a streamlined interface but offers fewer details and options than the free Google navigation on Android phones. Other than the lower price, there's little reason to consider the iPhone 4S **(A13, B6, D9).** Apple's newest phone has the first smart-phone camera we've tested that yields excellent still photos and very good video, and its superb Siri voice assistant now works with apps, too. But unlike other 4G Verizon and Sprint smart

A1 Motorola

A2 Samsung

B3 HTC

Ratings Smart phones

Recommended models only From 59 tested. In performance order, by carrier.

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model (Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model. We also list models of some phones offered by other carriers.)	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Ease of use	Messaging	Web browsing	Display quality	Voice quality	Phoning	Battery life	Camera: Image quality	Camera: Video quality	Portability	Operating system	Display size (in.)	Camera (megapixels)	Broadband 4G data	World phone	Memory-card slot
	A	**VERIZON** This carrier was among the more satisfying in almost all cities in our survey.																			
✔	1	**Motorola** Droid Razr Maxx	$200	78	●	●	●	◓	○	◓	●	◓	○	◓	A	4.3	8.0	•	•	•
✔	2	**Samsung** Galaxy S III (32GB) 16GB $200	250	76	●	●	●	●	○	●	○	◓	○	◓	A	4.8	8.0	•		•
✔	3	**Apple** iPhone 5 (16GB) 32GB, $300; 64GB, $400	200	75	●	◓	●	●	○	◓	○	●	◓	●	i	4.0	8.0	•	•	
✔	4	**Motorola** Droid Razr M	100	75	●	●	●	●	○	◓	○	◓	○	●	A	4.3	8.0	•	•	•
✔	5	**Motorola** Droid Razr	200	75	●	●	●	◓	○	◓	○	◓	○	◓	A	4.3	8.0	•	•	•
✔	6	**LG** Spectrum	100	73	●	●	●	●	○	◓	○	○	◒	◓	A	4.5	8.0	•		•
✔	7	**Motorola** Droid 4	100	73	●	●	●	◓	○	◓	○	◓	○	○	A	4.0	8.0	•	•	•
✔	8	**Samsung** Galaxy Nexus Also available on Sprint, $100	50	72	●	◓	●	●	◒	◓	○	○	○	◓	A	4.7	5.0	•		
✔	9	**Samsung** Stratosphere	50	72	●	●	●	●	◒	●	○	○	◒	○	A	4.0	4.9	•		•
✔	10	**HTC** Droid Incredible 4G LTE	150	71	●	●	●	●	◒	○	○	○	○	◓	A	4.0	8.0	•		•
✔	11	**LG** Lucid	50	70	●	●	●	◓	◒	◓	○	○	◒	◓	A	4.0	4.9	•		•
✔	12	**Samsung** Droid Charge	100	69	●	●	●	●	◒	◓	◒	○	○	○	A	4.3	8.0	•		•
✔	13	**Apple** iPhone 4S (16GB) 32GB, $200; 64GB, $300	100	67	●	◓	○	●	○	◓	○	◓	◓	●	i	3.5	8.0		•	
	B	**SPRINT** This carrier was among the more satisfying in almost all cities in which it was rated in our survey.																			
✔	1	**Samsung** Galaxy S III (16GB) 32GB, $250 Also available on US Cellular; 16GB, $200; 32GB, $250. Also available on Credo Mobile; 16GB $200; 32GB, $250	200	76	●	●	●	●	○	●	○	◓	○	◓	A	4.8	8.0	•		•
✔	2	**Apple** iPhone 5 (16GB) 32GB, $300; 64GB, $400	200	75	●	◓	●	●	○	◓	○	●	◓	●	i	4.0	8.0	•	•	
✔	3	**HTC** Evo 4G LTE	200	73	●	●	●	●	○	◓	○	◒	○	◓	A	4.7	8.0	•		•
✔	4	**Motorola** Photon Q 4G LTE	200	73	●	●	●	●	○	◓	○	◓	○	○	A	4.3	8.0	•	•	•
✔	5	**LG** Viper	0	69	●	●	●	◓	◒	◓	○	○	◒	◓	A	4.0	4.9	•		•
✔	6	**Apple** iPhone 4S (16GB) 32GB, $200; 64GB, $300. Also available on Virgin Mobile; $650 no contract	100	67	●	◓	○	●	○	◓	○	◓	◓	●	i	3.5	8.0		•	

C5 T-Mobile

D7 LG

D10 Samsung

phones, **A3** and **B2** can't simultaneously support a phone call and an Internet-based connection over the cellular network.That makes **D2** arguably the best iPhone 5 for multitaskers, despite the track record of AT&T service in our surveys. **A4** may not be as thin as its sibling **A5** or have **A1's** marathon battery life, but it managed to squeeze the same large, 4.3-inch display into a much more palm-friendly case and delivers the same high level of performance and convenient features. The thin, lightweight **C2** has an especially intuitive interface. On all of these phones, the camera lets you snap a still while shooting a video.

Excellent
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor
Recommended

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Ease of use	Messaging	Web browsing	Display quality	Voice quality	Phoning	Battery life	Camera: Image quality	Camera: Video quality	Portability	Operating system [1]	Display size (in.)	Camera (megapixels)	Broadband 4G data	World phone	Memory-card slot
	C	**T-MOBILE** This carrier was among the more satisfying in many of the cities in which it was rated in our survey.																		
✔	1	**Samsung** Galaxy S III (16GB) 32GB, $150	$100	78	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	A	4.8	8.0	●	●	●
✔	2	**HTC** One S	0	77	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Very good	Very good	Good	Good	Excellent	A	4.3	8.0	●	●	
✔	3	**Samsung** Galaxy S II	150	75	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Excellent	Good	Very good	Good	Very good	A	4.5	8.0	●	●	●
✔	4	**Samsung** Galaxy S Blaze 4G	0	74	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Very good	Good	Good	Fair	Very good	A	4.0	4.9	●	●	●
✔	5	**T-Mobile** myTouch 4G	0	69	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Excellent	Good	Very good	Good	Fair	Good	Very good	A	3.8	5.1	●	●	●
	D	**AT&T** This carrier scored the lowest in satisfaction in almost all cities in our survey.																		
✔	1	**Samsung** Galaxy S III (16GB)	200	78	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Good	Very good	A	4.8	8.0	●	●	●
✔	2	**Apple** iPhone 5 (16GB) 32GB, $300; 64GB, $400	200	77	Excellent	Very good	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Very good	Good	Excellent	Very good	Excellent	i	4.0	8.0	●	●	
✔	3	**HTC** One X	100	76	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Very good	Good	Good	Fair	Very good	A	4.7	8.0	●	●	
✔	4	**Samsung** Galaxy S II Sky-rocket	100	76	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Excellent	Good	Very good	Good	Very good	A	4.5	8.0	●	●	●
✔	5	**Samsung** Galaxy Note	200	75	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Very good	Good	Good	Good	Fair	A	5.3	8.0	●	●	●
✔	6	**Motorola** Atrix HD	100	75	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Very good	Very good	Very good	Fair	Very good	A	4.5	8.0	●	●	●
✔	7	**LG** Nitro HD	50	75	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Fair	Very good	Good	Good	Fair	Very good	A	4.5	8.0	●	●	●
✔	8	**HTC** Vivid	50	75	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	Good	Good	Good	A	4.5	8.0	●	●	●
✔	9	**Apple** iPhone 4S (16GB)	100	74	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Excellent	Good	Very good	Good	Very good	Very good	Excellent	i	3.5	8.0	●	●	
✔	10	**Samsung** Galaxy Exhilarate	30	73	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Very good	Good	Good	Fair	Very good	A	4.0	4.9	●	●	●
✔	11	**Nokia** Lumia 900	50	71	Very good	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Very good	Good	Fair	Good	Good	W	4.3	8.0	●	●	
✔	12	**HTC** Titan II	200	71	Very good	Excellent	Excellent	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	Good	Good	Good	W	4.7	16.1	●	●	
✔	13	**Sony** Xperia ion	100	71	Very good	Very good	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	Very good	A	4.6	12.0	●	●	●
✔	14	**Samsung** Focus 2	50	70	Very good	Very good	Excellent	Very good	Good	Very good	Good	Very good	Fair	Excellent	W	4.0	5.0	●	●	
✔	15	**Samsung** Rugby Smart	50	70	Very good	Excellent	Very good	Excellent	Good	Very good	Good	Good	Fair	Very good	A	3.7	4.9	●	●	●

[1] A=Android, i = iOS, and W=Windows Phone.

BEST FOR LONG BATTERY LIFE

A1 Motorola Droid Razr Maxx (Verizon) $200

This is a marathon performer, thanks to one of the largest-capacity batteries ever squeezed into a smart phone. It delivered 13.25 hours of talk time on a single charge in our tests. In other respects, this phone is nearly identical to **A5,** though the beefier battery makes it slightly thicker and heavier. (A new version, the Droid Razr HD Maxx, is expected by year's end.)

FOR A TABLET ALTERNATIVE

D5 Samsung Galaxy Note (AT&T) $200

With its 5.3-inch screen, this Samsung will strain some pockets, and even those with large hands will struggle with one-handed operation. But the phone's large display, offering top-notch performance even in bright light, makes it a compelling choice for e-book fans and heavy Web users who don't also tote a tablet around. The included S Pen stylus allows you to jot down notes or sketches on the memo app and crop photos by simply tracing over them. (The even bigger Samsung Note II, with a 5.5-inch screen, was expected to go on the market in late October.)

BEST CHOICES WITH A KEYBOARD

A7 Motorola Droid 4 (Verizon) $100
A9 Samsung Stratosphere (Verizon) $50
B4 Motorola Photon Q 4G LTE (Sprint) $200

These are fine choices for serious typists frustrated by virtual touch-screen keyboards. The slide-out keyboards of these phones are among the best we've seen. They're clearly labeled and logically laid out and have five rows, with dedicated buttons for numbers across the top row. Their keyboards have directional buttons for more-precise Web scrolling and cursor placement. **A9** also has a button for inserting emoticons into text and instant messages.

Best brands

Repair and performance histories can help you choose a winner

WE TEST hundreds of electronics products every year, focusing on the brands and models you're most likely to buy. But nobody can test everything. So what happens if you're considering a TV, camera, computer, or printer that hasn't gone through our labs? No worries—we've got you covered.

Our new Brand Report Card pulls together everything we know about the products in those categories to give you guidance about models we haven't tested. Brand-level advice isn't as foolproof as model-specific Ratings, but it can minimize your chance of buying a clunker and maximize the likelihood that you'll take home a top-notch product.

Keep in mind that our repair data are historical and can't predict future reliability, and changes in manufacture can affect reliability. Still, picking a brand with a good track record can reduce the chance that you'll run into problems.

LCD and plasma TVs

Consumers have spoken, and they have encouraging words about TV reliability. According to their reports on 200,000-plus TVs, most major brands have been reliable, with an overall repair rate of just 4 percent during the first four years of use. Westinghouse was the most repair-prone of the 16 LCD brands covered. (See chart for more details.)

When there were problems, they most often occurred early—57 percent of reported repairs took place during the first year of ownership, a period usually covered by the standard manufacturer warranty. That reinforces our advice that extended warranties aren't a good investment for most users. If you're one of the unfortunate few who have a problem, be prepared for a wait: 28 percent of users who had a repair said it took three weeks or longer, reducing their satisfaction.

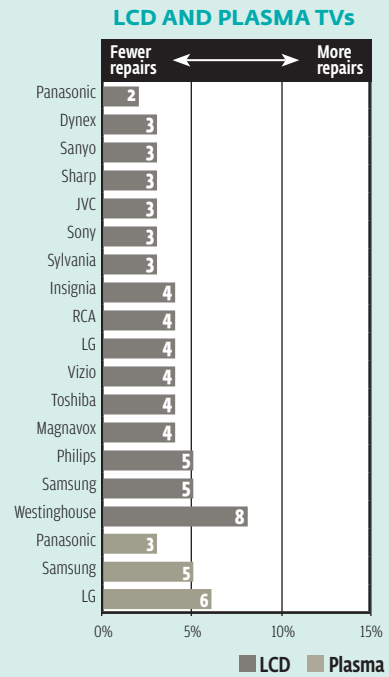
The news about plasma and LCD TV performance is mixed. A number of brands stand out as solid choices, based on our tests over the past few years, but we'd urge some caution with half a dozen makes that have had hits and misses in our Ratings.

Here are our recommendations, based on our reliability data and Ratings history for these brands over the past few years:

SAFEST BETS LCD TVs from LG, Panasonic, Samsung, and Sony, as well as Panasonic plasma TVs, have consistently been among the top performers in our Ratings over the past few years. Plasma TVs from Samsung and LG have had consistently strong performance in our tests, just a bit below the best. Given that top-notch track record, we believe other TVs from those brands are likely to do just as well. Also reassuring: The TV buyers we surveyed have reported a low rate of repairs for TVs from those brands.

SAFE BETS Vizio, Sanyo, and Sharp LCDs have delivered generally strong performance that should satisfy all but the most demanding viewers. Their track record suggests that other models will follow suit. All of those brands have had a low rate of repairs.

Most and least reliable



Based on the 2012 Annual Product Reliability Survey, conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, for 190,806 LCD and 26,094 plasma TVs purchased new between 2008 and the first half of 2012. Differences of fewer than 3 percentage points are not meaningful.

STICK WITH A TESTED MODEL Other brands have a less consistent track record in our Ratings. Some LCD TVs from Insignia, JVC, Philips, and Toshiba did quite well, but others had lower scores. We have less confidence that an untested model from one of those brands will offer performance comparable to its best tested siblings. On the plus side, TVs from all of those brands have had a low rate of repairs.

Magnavox and Westinghouse LCDs had lower overall scores than most, suggesting that untested sets from those brands are less likely to be high performers. Magnavox had a low rate of repairs. With all of those brands, your best bet would be to look for a TV we've tested.

PHOTO (TV SCREEN): ROBERT DALY/GETTY IMAGES

Digital cameras

Shutterbugs, you can breathe easy—digital cameras have a solid track record for reliability, according to our surveys. Overall, only 4 percent were repaired or had a serious problem during the first few years of use.

There was no meaningful difference in reliability among brands covered in the survey. (See chart.) Among point-and-shoot users who reported repairs, the power-up function was the problem 18 percent of the time; the lens and autofocus on SLRs and SLR-likes were the trouble 17 percent of the time.

Performance varies more, according to an analysis of three years of Ratings. Here's our take on two types of point-and-shoots:

SUPERZOOMS If you're thinking of buying a superzoom that we haven't tested, your safest bets are cameras from Panasonic, Canon, and Sony. All three brands consistently did very well in our tests, with no low-scoring models in our Ratings. Given that track record, we believe other superzooms from those brands are likely to do just as well.

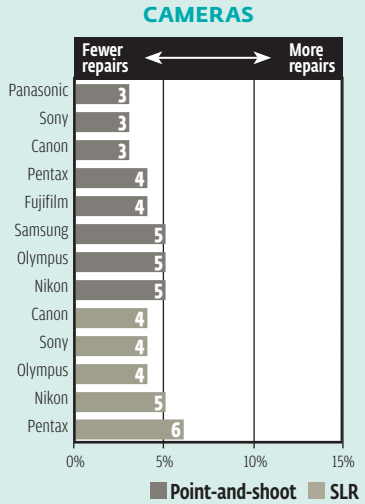
Close behind were Nikon and Olympus superzooms, with a mix of high performers and models with lower but still solid scores. In all likelihood, untested superzooms from those two brands should do well.

Fujifilm and Samsung superzooms showed more variation in performance, with some models doing very well but others middling or below. A tested model would be your safest choice for both brands.

SUBCOMPACTS In general, few subcompacts scored as highly as the top superzooms in our tests. As a result, we can't give you as much assurance that a model we haven't tested will be a winner. But we test most of the subcompacts on the market, so in many cases we can give you model-specific advice.

If you are considering a subcompact we haven't tested, your safest bet is a Panasonic. Its subcompacts have had the most consistent record of very good performance in our tests, so there's a good chance you'd be satisfied with one of its cameras. Canon and Nikon did almost as well, though they had a few lower-scoring models. On the whole, it seems unlikely that you'd be disappointed with one of their subcompacts.

Most and least reliable



Based on the 2012 Annual Product Reliability Survey, conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, for 126,239 digital cameras purchased between 2008 and the first half of 2012. Differences of less than 3 points aren't meaningful. We've adjusted the data to eliminate differences linked solely to the age of the digital camera.

Our analysis of subcompacts from Samsung, Sony, Pentax, Olympus, Fujifilm, and G.E. didn't find the same consistently high scores, suggesting that with those brands it would be safest to stick with a tested model.

Printers

We've focused our attention on all-in-one inkjet printers, the best-selling type. They give you the option of printing in color as well as black-and-white, along with copying and scanning functions.

We don't have reliability information on printers, but we can offer you advice based on how the major brands have performed in our tests over the past few years. Dell has only a few all-in-ones in its line, which we've tested, and those have performed well. We've also studied the cost of printing, which can make or break your satisfaction with a printer over the long term.

SAFEST BETS If you're thinking of buying an all-in-one inkjet that we haven't tested, consider models from Canon and HP. That's the message from our analysis of three years of Ratings. The Canon models we've tested have consistently had solid scores—in fact, some have been among the best we've tested. Given that track record, we believe other Canon printers are likely to be fine performers. Most of the HP models we've tested have done almost as well, so the odds are in your favor that an untested model should provide satisfactory or better performance.

SAFE BETS Brother, Epson, and Kodak all-in-ones have mostly had solid or better scores, but a few models from those brands fell short. In all probability, their printers should be acceptable choices, but they're less likely to be high performers than the brands mentioned previously.

STICK WITH A TESTED MODEL Lexmark all-in-one inkjet models varied in performance over the past few years. Many of the most recently tested printers did very well, though some older models had fairly low scores. The trend is encouraging, but at this point we believe you'd still be best off consulting our Ratings.

CONSIDER PRINTING COSTS As we've often pointed out, an inkjet printer's monthly operating cost is a critical factor to consider. Paying a bundle for ink and special photo paper over the life of a printer can quickly wipe out any savings you realized in buying a cheap model. The problem is, you can't bank on

manufacturer's estimates, which are often unrealistic. If you're greatly concerned about print costs, buy a tested printer. Our Ratings include monthly cost estimates that are based on what we consider a typical mix of text, graphics, and photos.

For the models in our Ratings on page 44, print costs varied quite a bit, from roughly $5 to $13 a month, even for models from the same manufacturer. Given the cost variation, we can't generalize about which brand is more or less costly to use. But we did find reassuring news: Two-thirds of the tested models had print costs of less than $10 a month. Find tips on how you can reduce inkjet printing costs on page 46.

Continued on next page

Ratings Tech support

In order of reader satisfaction score.

Better ◀——▶ Worse

Manufacturer	Reader score (0–100)	Phone support	Online support	Problem solved
Apple	78	◒	○	73%
Dell	59	●	●	61
Lenovo	59	◒	●	53
HP/Compaq	56	●	●	51
Asus	55	●	●	45
Toshiba	55	●	●	45
Acer/Gateway/eMachines	54	●	●	42

Based on responses from 7,470 owners of 8,652 desktop, laptop, and netbook computers who contacted a manufacturer's tech-support service between January 2011 and January 2012. All respondents were Consumer Reports *subscribers. A score of 100 would mean all respondents were completely satisfied; 80, that respondents were very satisfied, on average; 60, fairly well satisfied; and 40, somewhat dissatisfied. Differences of fewer than 6 points are not meaningful. Phone support and online support were rated on a scale from very poor to excellent. Online support was rated by those respondents who contacted a manufacturer via a website, e-mail, or online live-chat program. "Problem solved" indicates the percentage of people who said the manufacturer solved their problem. Differences of fewer than 9 percentage points are not meaningful.*

Computers

It's hard to generalize about computer brands for several reasons, including the fact that the configuration, or the components a specific model has, determines a computer's speed and performance. Both of those factors are heavily weighted when we figure a model's score.

Even so, one brand stands out as the best all-around choice: Apple. Year after year, its laptops and desktops have done very well in our tests, which has led us to almost invariably recommend Apple models. Apple also excels in tech support. For reliability, its laptops have been comparable to Windows-based PCs, and its desktops have had fewer repairs.

PERFORMANCE Though Apple has had consistently high scores, we've found more variation in performance among Windows-based PCs. A given PC brand might have some top-scoring models and others that scored lower. We're continuing to analyze our Ratings to look for patterns.

Depending on your needs, other factors might trump performance. For example, if you travel frequently, size and weight may be more important than having a full-sized keyboard. Or if your budget is tight and your computing needs fairly basic, a low-priced model with a less-powerful processor might make the most sense for you.

Generally, we recommend that you stick with one of the brands we regularly test. Then narrow your choice based on reliability and tech support, and choose a configuration that suits your needs and budget.

TECH SUPPORT Tech support in general is among the lowest-rated services in all of the surveys conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center. But that doesn't apply to Apple, which beat all the makers of Windows-based PCs covered in our most recent survey.

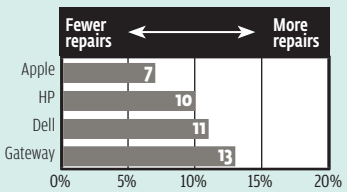
Apple solved user problems 73 percent of the time, compared with 61 percent for its nearest competitor, Dell. Apple also had higher marks for phone and online support. Apple continues to offer unlimited free support at Apple Stores after its 90-day free phone support runs out. Many makers of Windows-based PCs provide free technical support for a year.

RELIABILITY Overall, computers have had a higher rate of repairs than TVs or cameras. No brand of laptops stood out as being more or less repair prone. The eight brands in our survey had comparable reliability, with an overall repair rate of 11 percent during the first three years. Among desktops, Apple has been among the least repair-prone. (See chart.)

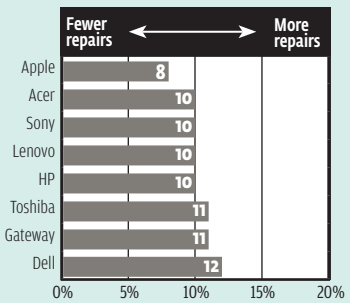
For laptops and desktops, our findings show that 44 percent of all respondents who had made a repair paid nothing because they were covered by a free warranty or service contract. For those who did have to pay, the median out-of-pocket cost was about $150.

Most and least reliable

DESKTOP COMPUTERS



LAPTOP COMPUTERS



Based on the 2012 Annual Product Reliability Survey, conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, for 23,582 laptop computers and 8,007 desktop PCs purchased between 2009 and the first half of 2012. Differences of fewer than 4 points are not meaningful.

PHOTO (COMPUTER SCREEN): NATE PARKER MAINE PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES

Reports

Wireless speakers 53
Toasters 54
Gas furnaces 54
Coffeemakers 55
Cooking appliances 56
Cordless drills 60

Lab tests

Ratings, reviews, recommendations

A2 Edifier

A3 JBL

Great sound, wire-free

Wireless speaker systems let you play music stored on a phone, tablet, media player, or computer that's across the room or even elsewhere in the house. Our tests showed you don't have to trade sound quality for convenience. But these systems don't come cheap—the tested models cost $200 to $650.

Most of the tested models use Bluetooth, which works with a wide range of mobile devices, including Android phones. Several use Apple's AirPlay technology, which works on Wi-Fi. Sonos uses Wi-Fi to create a network in which each device acts as a repeater, extending the range. With some models, you might also get an iPod dock or the ability to connect an iPod or iPhone via USB. All but one of the systems have built-in auxiliary audio inputs for connecting other gear, such as a TV.

Making setup easier

Give up wires, not good sound. **A1 Sonos, A2 Edifier,** and **A3 JBL** deliver full, rich sound that can rival home-theater-in-a-box and soundbar speaker systems. All but one of the other models were good. With **A1**, when we added a second Play:3 for a two-speaker stereo setup, sound quality was excellent.

Some are very easy to use. In general, Bluetooth models were a bit easier to set up, because pairing took fewer steps than connecting via Wi-Fi. **A1 Sonos, A4 Samsung,** and **B1 Bose** were the easiest to use overall. **B2 Monster** connected easily, but the controls on the console were poorly marked and voice commands were annoying. **A6 Klipsch** had an easy-to-use remote but took a hit for missing key setup steps in its user manual and for poorly marked controls.

They can be stylish. Several models are plain and boxy, but others sport striking designs—none more so than the sail-shaped **A2 Edifier** Spinnaker. **A3 JBL** has a unique X-shaped design. **B1 Bose's** integrated stand doubles as a fold-over cover for traveling. Whether perched atop its glass stand or wall mounted, **A6 Klipsch** resembles a stylish soundbar. And you'll find a pair of vacuum tubes glowing beneath a clear circular window cut into the cherry-wood finish on the top of **A4 Samsung.**

Ratings

All tested models In performance order, within types.

Excellent · Very good · Good · Fair · Poor · ☑ Recommended

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Test results: Sound quality	Test results: Ease of use	Test results: Versatility	Features: Wireless type	Features: Multiroom option (max no. of rooms)	Features: Remote	Features: Analog audio input	Features: iPod dock
	A	**HOME SYSTEMS**										
☑	1	**Sonos** Play:3 (S3) with wireless Bridge [1]	$350	67	Very good	Very good	Good	Wi-Fi (proprietary)	32	opt.	opt.	opt.
☑	2	**Edifier** Spinnaker Bluetooth Speaker System	350	61	Very good	Good	Good	Bluetooth		•	•	
	3	**JBL** OnBeat Xtreme	500	60	Very good	Good	Good	Bluetooth		•	•	[2]
	4	**Samsung** Dock DA-E750	650	59	Good	Very good	Very good	Bluetooth, Wi-Fi (Apple AirPlay, DLNA)	6	•	•	[2]
	5	**Altec** Lansing inAir 5000 Wireless Airplay Speaker (MA5000)	250	46	Good	Good	Good	Wi-Fi (Apple AirPlay)	6	•	•	•
	6	**Klipsch** Gallery G-17 Air	500	41	Good	Fair	Good	Wi-Fi (Apple AirPlay)	6	•	•	•
	B	**PORTABLE SYSTEMS**										
	1	**Bose** SoundLink Wireless Mobile Speaker	270	47	Good	Very good	Good	Bluetooth			•	
	2	**Monster** Clarity HD Micro Speaker	200	21	Fair	Poor	Good	Bluetooth			•	

[1] Play:3 costs $300; wireless bridge is $50 option. [2] Requires adapter to work with latest iPhone, iPod, and iPad.

Features vary. **A1 Sonos** can wirelessly stream songs from dozens of online music services. You can stream audio to up to 32 Sonos speaker setups in different rooms. **A2 Edifier** has an optical digital audio input for connecting other gear, plus an output for adding a subwoofer. **A3 JBL's** iPod/iPhone/iPad docking arm rotates from portrait to landscape view, handy for watching video. It has a composite-video output for sending video to a TV and a speaker-phone function. **A4 Samsung's** retractable "dual" dock works with iPhones, iPads, and iPods with the original 30-pin connector, and Samsung's own Galaxy S II and III Android smart phones and its Galaxy Note tablet/phone. **B1 Bose** can remember up to six Bluetooth devices. **B2 Monster,** the smallest, responds to voice commands and works as a speaker phone.

Bluetooth vs. Wi-Fi

Bluetooth is supported by many portable devices, including Android phones and tablets. But you can stream to just one at a time, within a 30-foot range. Apple AirPlay uses Wi-Fi and has a longer range. You can stream from an iPod, iPhone, or iPad to one speaker, but a computer running iTunes can feed up to six speakers on the same network. AirPlay is Apple-centric; you'll need special apps to make it work with an Android device. Sonos' network can stream music to as many as 32 rooms.

Best for your bread

Cuisinart CPT-420, $80
Cuisinart's new two-slice toaster claimed the top spot in our Ratings from its older brandmate, the Cuisinart CPT-170, $70. Both turn out evenly browned toast with almost every batch, and they feature bagel, defrost, and reheat settings, as well as brushed stainless-steel housings. Paying more for the updated model gets you a motorized lift that raises and lowers bread with the push of a button, instead of the traditional push lever.
Bottom line. The new Cuisinart costs more than many toasters, but its solid performance and sleek design might be worth the investment, especially if you plan to use it every day.

Hamilton Beach Digital 22502, $35
Hamilton Beach's two-slice toaster performs almost as well as the Cuisinart for less than half the price. This CR Best Buy's defrost and bagel settings, as well as its extra-wide slots, are helpful if you toast more than thin-sliced bread. And its slide-out crumb tray eases cleaning. While many inexpensive toasters resort to plastic housings, the Hamilton Beach has the same brushed-metal exterior of pricier models.
Bottom line. There are even less expensive toasters on the market, but when it comes to balancing value and performance, this one was second to none in our tests.

Breville BTA840XL, $180
If you're often toasting for a crowd, this Breville is the only four-slice model that makes our recommended list, popping out successive batches of evenly browned toast. It uses an automated lift instead of a push lever, and its "a bit more" setting automatically provides extra toasting time. Measuring about 12x11x8 inches, the toaster is a formidable addition to any countertop, and its brushed die-cast metal housing gives it a professional look.
Bottom line. This is a serious toaster with a hefty price tag to match, but you get plenty for the investment.

Two from TV-land are, um, toast

Gordon Ramsay Everyday 16117 (Kmart), $25
Food Network 18010 (Kohl's), $60
The potty-mouthed British restaurateur Gordon Ramsay is known for skewering incompetents on programs like "Hell's Kitchen" and "Kitchen Nightmares." So you'd think that he would hold his toaster to a higher standard. But lackluster performance, especially in our successive batch testing, dropped it to dead last in our Ratings. The Food Network's two-slice toaster was a little better at successive batches, though it was just as bad at toasting a single slice as the Ramsay toaster.

Gas furnaces you can count on

Dreading a furnace replacement? Today's more-efficient gas furnaces can save you around $17 for every $100 you spend on fuel compared with older models. They are also, on average, less likely to need repairs, according to our survey. But you might want to think twice about gas furnaces from York, which broke down almost twice as often as other brands.

That's what subscribers told us about 32,251 furnaces they bought between 2007 and early 2012. Reliability is especially important because when a furnace failed, 75 percent needed significant work. A majority of those broke down completely, with nearly a third producing no heat for more than a day. For 38 percent, the repair cost $150 or more.

If a key part such as the heat exchanger or control module fails, you're better off replacing the furnace if it's more than about 15 years old. Otherwise, repairing rather than replacing a furnace might make more sense.

If your furnace is on the fritz, try the following before you call a contractor or start shopping:

Check the filter. If you're getting low airflow, check the air filter on the furnace. A clogged filter could cut airflow down to a trickle. The top-rated 3M Filtrete Elite Allergen 2200MPR, $24, traps dust better than the usual furnace filter, so it can also help clean the air. Check it monthly, and replace when dirty.

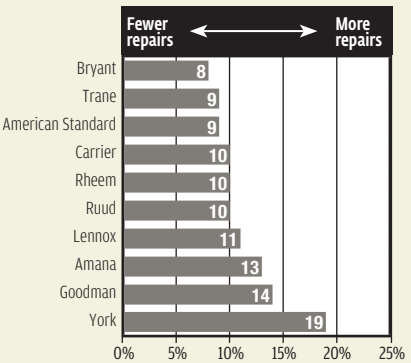
Inspect electrical parts. Loose wires or a thermostat malfunction could also cause heat problems. If your thermostat runs on batteries, try changing them. And make sure that burned-out fuses or tripped breakers haven't shut power to the fan or circuit board.

Every home with a gas or oil furnace should have a CO alarm on each floor and near (not inside) an attached garage. One we recommend is the First Alert CO615, $40. Test the alarm weekly, vacuum it monthly, and replace it every five years. Don't remember how old the alarm is? Look on the back for the manufacture date.

Most and least reliable

Choosing a brand with a good repair history can improve your odds of getting a reliable brand. Models within a brand may vary, and changes in design or manufacturing may affect future reliability. Differences of fewer than 4 points aren't meaningful, and we've adjusted the data to account for the age of the furnace.

GAS FURNACES



Source: Annual Product Reliability Survey, Consumer Reports National Research Center.

Hottest coffeemakers

YOU CAN SPEND $200 or more for a coffeemaker with interactive displays and the stainless construction you'd find on a pro-style range. But our latest tests of almost 90 models show that a consistently good cup of joe starts at as little as $40.

Conventional drip models. Our top drip machines reached 195° F to 205° F for about 5 minutes, the industry standard for optimal brewing. That and helpful features like an alert when cleaning is needed helped the **A4 Black & Decker,** $40, join our winner's list. You can also pay more and get less: DeLonghi's magenta-and-chrome kMix 10-cup DCM04 cost $150 but did not make our recommended list.

If you're into self-serve. Brew-and-dispense models let you fill your cup right from the machine, which keeps the coffee hot. The **B4 Cuisinart,** $100, brewed superbly and can be preset to start when you wake up. An even better deal: the **B2 Mr. Coffee,** a CR Best Buy, which delivers more for less at $50.

If you want a built-in grinder. Breville's new YouBrew BDC600XL, $280, boasts a stainless finish and an interactive LCD menu. But its thermal carafe was hard to empty. Consider instead the **C1 Krups,** a CR Best Buy at $130, which aced our brewing tests and proved to be easier to use.

When you're on the go. Single-serve models, also known as pod machines, brew a cup at a time from sealed beverage packets—no fuss, no muss. The doughnut-shaped **1 DeLonghi,** $150, was convenient and fast, with consistent temperatures, though its joystick control makes it hard to precisely adjust for the mug you're using. One thing to consider before making a purchase: **1** and **2 Smart Café** don't use the widely available K-cups; they use their own types of capsules.

A1 Mr. Coffee

B1 Hamilton Beach

C1 Krups

Ratings

Recommended models only From 89 tested.

CR Best Buy · Recommended

Excellent · Very good · Good · Fair · Poor

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model (Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.)	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Test results: Brewing	Convenience	Carafe handling	Features: Programmable	Thermal carafe	Strength control
	A	**8- TO 12-CUP DRIP MODELS WITH CARAFES**								
✔	1	**Mr. Coffee** BVMC-SJX33GT BVMC-EHX33CP (Costco)	$ 40	84	Excellent	Very good	Very good	•		•
✔	2	**Kalorik** CM25282	80	79	Excellent	Very good	Very good	•		
✔	3	**Waring** Pro CMS100	60	77	Very good	Very good	Very good	•		
✔	4	**Black & Decker** CM4000S (Target)	40	73	Very good	Excellent	Very good	•		•
✔	5	**Kenmore** Elite 06906	100	73	Very good	Excellent	Very good	•		•
✔	6	**Kalorik** TKM-20208	45	73	Very good	Very good	Very good		•	
✔	7	**Mr. Coffee** JWX27	40	73	Excellent	Good	Very good	•		•
✔	8	**Frigidaire** Professional Programmable Drip FPDC12D7MS	90	71	Very good	Very good	Excellent	•		•
	B	**10- TO 12-CUP BREW-AND-DISPENSE MODELS**								
✔	1	**Hamilton Beach** BrewStation 47454 47455E (Costco)	80	90	Excellent	Very good	NA	•	NA	•
✔	2	**Mr. Coffee** BVMC-ZH1B	50	88	Excellent	Very good	NA	•	NA	
✔	3	**Viante** Brew-N-View CAF-05T	140	85	Excellent	Very good	NA	•	NA	•
✔	4	**Cuisinart** Coffee on Demand DCC-3000	100	82	Excellent	Very good	NA	•	NA	
	C	**8- TO 12-CUP GRIND-AND-BREW MODEL**								
✔	1	**Krups** Grinder & Brewer KM7000	130	72	Excellent	Good	Very good	•		•

Worst from our tests

So-so brewing, convenience, or handling problems earned these models an overall score of 40 or less.

Drip models with carafes
- Bunn STX, $135
- KitchenAid KCM223CU, $130
- Bunn Phase Brew HT, $140

Grind-and-brew models
- Breville You Brew BDC600XL, $280

Single-serve models
- Breville BKC700XL, $250
- Hamilton Beach Personal Cup, 49970 $25
- TRU Eco TE-258, $40

Ratings Pod machines

Recommended models only From 18 tested.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Test results: Convenience	Speed: First cup	Speed: Repeat	Brew range	Consistency: Temperature	Consistency: Size
✔	1	**DeLonghi** Nescafé Dolce Gusto Circolo	$150	75	Very good	Excellent	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Good
✔	2	**Smart Café** My Invento	120	72	Excellent	Good	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Very good

Cooking appliances

Dozens dazzle, including eight CR Best Buys

HOT The GE Café CP350STSS cooktop is a top performer.

PEOPLE LOVE their pro-style ranges. We know because we asked them. But mediocre baking, broiling, and simmering on some of the $3,000-plus models can make them a dubious investment if you don't pick the right one. Our tests found four that cook well and look good and 22 mainstream models that perform as well or better for less.

Stellar styling was the top reason the almost 2,800 online subscribers we surveyed bought a pro-style or standard range between 2005 and 2012, closely followed by performance for pro-style-range buyers. And most were pleased with their pro range's sautéing, searing, and broiling. But those pricey products broke down more often, they took longer and cost more to repair ($250 on median compared to $150 for standard ranges), and it was harder to find someone to repair them. Despite those problems, 80 percent said they'd buy a pro-style range again.

If you want a pro-style range, consider the top-rated 36-inch KitchenAid KDRU-763VSS, $6,000. The dual-fuel model offers superb simmering and impressive baking and broiling. The KitchenAid KDRS407VSS, $3,500, is one of the few 30-inch pro-style ranges to cook well enough to ever make our Recommended list. It excels at simmering and offers fine baking and high heat on its cooktop, though broiling and capacity are so-so.

But you don't have to spend that much to get an attractive range, or cooktop and wall-oven combo, that will give you great results. Here's what our tests found:

Ranges: Battle of the broilers. Infrared heating promises intense broiling heat. It's on many gas grills, professional ranges, and now, some LG electric ranges. We broiled four burgers using the LG LRE3025S electric smoothtop, $1,250, with an infrared broiler and the LG LRE3023S, $1,000, with a standard electric broiler. Both produced burgers that were seared and juicy, though the infrared broiler was about a minute faster using its speed-broil setting, meant only for a few burgers or a couple of steaks. On its regular broil setting, for larger amounts of food, it wasn't as good as its less expensive brandmate in our standard broiling tests.

Cooktops: More burners, same space. Gas cooktops with five burners are common on 36-inch models, and now more 30-inch gas models also have them. But using all five at once might require some maneuvering, especially if you have big pots.

Wall ovens: More for less. Most of the top-rated models we've tested cost between $2,000 and $4,000, until now. Two large-capacity Whirlpools, the top-rated WOS92EC0AH, $1,500, with convection, and the WOS51EC0AS, $1,300, turned out evenly browned cakes and cookies and were excellent at evenly searing broiled burgers. The extra-large windows on those CR Best Buys make it easier to monitor cooking without opening the door.

Beyond stainless steel. It's still popular and is even on appliances costing less than $700, but if you're tired of heavy metal, Whirlpool's Ice Collection offers a glossy spin on white and black. GE's slate finish is a low-gloss metallic grey, and Viking's wasabi and Dijon finishes provide a real kick.

FAUX PRO The Electrolux EW30EF65GW combines stainless styling with impressive performance.

How to choose

Match your cooking to the appliance. Is your family filled with cookie monsters? Do you often broil food? Do you host gatherings? Then think about these tips:

Consider upgrades. If you're replacing an electric range or cooktop, take a look at induction models. They outperform everything we've tested and offer the responsiveness of gas. But you'll need magnetic cookware, and induction is expensive. Also consider convection, which uses one or more fans to circulate hot air in the oven, to cut cooking time. And for the ultimate in multitasking, dual-oven models let you cook dishes in each oven.

Hunt for deals. Search online for promotions from manufacturers and retailers. Check out the clearance models. And always haggle. Subscribers we surveyed who did said it worked seven out of 10 times and saved them $93 on average on each major appliance. Ask about free delivery, haul-away, and installation.

Skip the extended warranty. Our research has found that the repair bill is often comparable to the cost of the extended warranty (aka service contract). And your credit or debit card may automatically extend the standard warranty free.

BY THE NUMBERS **206** Models tested **2,844** Burgers broiled **9,480** Cookies baked

A2 LG

D1 GE

E1 KitchenAid

Overview

Ranges outsell cooktop and wall-oven combos. Below we focus on models that offer special strengths, value, or both.

☑ **CR Best Buy** These models offer the best combination of performance and price.
☑ **Recommended** The high-scoring models stand out for the reasons below.

ELECTRIC RANGES

A2 LG $1,000
A3 GE $2,600
A9 GE $700 **CR Best Buy**
C3 Samsung $1,700

A2 aced our cooking tests, except baking, where it was still impressive. **A3** offers five elements and a cooking drawer and was the only top pick in its group to excel at baking and broiling. **A9** combines great performance with a low price and has a warming zone. **C3** offers the speed and precision of induction.

GAS RANGES

D1 GE $1,500
D2 LG $1,900
D4 Frigidaire $800 **CR Best Buy**
D5 KitchenAid $2,200

Super simmering and impressive baking helped put **D1** on top. **D2** has a larger oven, better broiling, and convection. **D4** also has convection but trades some broiling and boiling prowess for a lower price. **D5** is a dual-fuel range, which pairs a gas cooktop with an electric oven. It has double ovens.

PROFESSIONAL RANGES

E1 KitchenAid $3,500
F1 KitchenAid $6,000

Both are dual-fuel models with convection. **E1** packs the pro look, fine baking, and three high-power burners that deliver fast heating into a 30-inch width, but the oven is small and broiling is so-so. **F1** offers better broiling and is 36 inches wide.

PICK THE PERFECT RANGE
Use your smart phone to download the RedLaser or ShopSavvy app and scan the code for our video.

Ratings Ranges

Recommended models only From 138 tested.

☑ CR Best Buy
☑ Recommended

● Excellent
◓ Very good
○ Good
◒ Fair
● Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model (Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.)	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Test results: Cooktop high	Cooktop low	Baking	Broiling	Oven capacity	Self-cleaning	Features: Second oven/cooking drawer	Convection
	A	**30-INCH SMOOTHTOP**										
☑	1	**Kenmore** 92163 97103	$1,480	87	●	●	◓	●	●	●		•
☑	2	**LG** LRE3023S	1,000	86	●	●	◓	●	●	◓		•
☑	3	**GE** Café CS980SNSS	2,600	86	◓	●	●	●	●	○	•	•
☑	4	**LG** LRE3025S	1,250	86	●	●	●	◓	●	◓		•
☑	5	**GE** PB920STSS	1,700	85	●	●	◓	◓	●	●		•
☑	6	**Kenmore** 92803	950	84	●	●	◓	●	●	●		•
☑	7	**Maytag** MET8885XS	1,600	83	●	●	●	○	●	○	•	•
☑	8	**Electrolux** EW30EF65GW	2,200	83	●	●	◓	●	◓	◓	•	•
☑	9	**GE** JB650DTWW JB655DTWW	700	81	●	●	◓	◓	●	●		
☑	10	**LG** LDE3015ST	1,300	81	●	●	◓	●	●	◓	•	
☑	11	**LG** LRE3012ST	850	81	●	●	◓	◓	●	◓		
	B	**30-INCH ELECTRIC COIL**										
☑	1	**GE** JBP35SMSS	650	82	◓	●	●	○	●	●		
	C	**30-INCH ELECTRIC INDUCTION**										
☑	1	**GE** Profile PHB925SPSS	2,700	90	●	●	◓	●	●	●		•
☑	2	**Kenmore** Elite 97203	2,500	89	●	●	●	●	●	●		•
☑	3	**Samsung** FTQ307NWGX	1,700	89	●	●	●	●	●	◓		•
	D	**30-INCH GAS AND DUAL-FUEL**										
☑	1	**GE** Profile PGB910SEMSS	1,500	74	◓	●	◓	○	◓	○		
☑	2	**LG** LRG3097ST	1,900	74	◓	●	◓	◓	●	○		•
☑	3	**LG** LRG3095ST	1,400	72	○	●	◓	◓	●	○		•
☑	4	**Frigidaire** Gallery FGGF3032MW	800	71	○	●	◓	○	◓	○		•
☑	5	**KitchenAid** KDRS505XSS*	2,200	71	○	●	◓	◓	●	○	•	•
☑	6	**LG** LRG3091SW	1,000	71	○	●	◓	○	●	○		
☑	7	**Electrolux** EW30GF65GW	2,200	70	○	●	◓	◓	◓	○	•	•
	E	**30-INCH PROFESSIONAL DUAL-FUEL**										•
☑	1	**KitchenAid** KDRS407VSS KDRU707VSS	3,500	72	◓	●	◓	○	○	◓		•
	F	**36-INCH PROFESSIONAL GAS AND DUAL-FUEL**										
☑	1	**KitchenAid** KDRU763VSS* KDRU767VSS, KDRS467VSS, KDRS-463VSS, KDRS462VSS	6,000	74	◓	●	◓	◓	◓	◓		•
☑	2	**GE** Monogram ZDP364NDPSS*	7,500	72	○	●	◓	○	◓	◓		•
☑	3	**Thermador** Pro Grand PG366B[S] PG364GEBS, PG364GLBS	6,000	69	◓	●	◓	○	◓	○		•

*Dual-fuel model.

Overview

Cooktop and wall-oven combos offer lots of design flexibility. Many of these cooktops earned Excellent overall scores. These wall ovens deliver top-notch baking, broiling, and styling at a lower price.

SMOOTHTOP MODELS

A2 **Kenmore** $640 **CR Best Buy**
A5 **Electrolux** $1,200
A7 **Whirlpool** $700 **CR Best Buy**
B1 **Frigidaire** $1,000

Among 30-inch models **A2** does almost as well as its top-scoring brandmate for half the price. Paying more for **A5** buys five elements instead of the usual four and more stainless. **A7** lacks stainless trim but outshines models costing almost twice as much. **B1** also has five elements but is 36 inches wide.

ELECTRIC INDUCTION MODELS

C1 **Kenmore** $1,600
C2 **GE** $1,400
C6 **Frigidaire** $1,200 **CR Best Buy**
C8 **Whirlpool** $1,200 **CR Best Buy**

C1 has four elements, including three high-power, and stainless trim. **C2** has two high-power elements. Both offer superfast heating. **C6** has two conventional smoothtop elements and two induction. **C8** has touch controls that are center-mounted.

GAS MODELS

D1 **Bosch** $1,100
D2 **Kenmore** $1,200
E1 **Thermador** $1,900
E6 **LG** $1,300
E7 **Bosch** $1,200

All have five burners. **D1** and **D2** offer superb simmering, something few 30-inch models we tested could do, but were so-so in fast heating. **D1** has only one high-power burner; **D2** has two. **E1** was the only 36-inch-wide model scoring Excellent overall. **E6** and **E7** cost hundreds less, and **E7** has four high-power burners, the most of all. Both are 36 inches wide.

TOP WALL OVENS

1 **Whirlpool** $1,500 **CR Best Buy**
2 **Whirlpool** $1,300 **CR Best Buy**

Both offer superb broiling, impressive baking and capacity, and extra-large windows that let you keep an eye on what's cooking. The convection feature on **1** cuts cooking time.

OUR COOKTOP AND WALL-OVEN GUIDE
Use your smart phone to download the RedLaser or ShopSavvy app and scan the code for the video.

Ratings Cooktops

Recommended models only From 48 tested.

Excellent · Very good · Good · Fair · Poor
CR Best Buy · Recommended

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Test results: Cooktop high	Test results: Cooktop low	Features: High-power burners	Features: Medium-power burners	Features: Low-power burners	Features: Touch controls	Features: Expandable elements/continuous grates
	A	**30-INCH ELECTRIC SMOOTHTOP**									
✓	1	**Kenmore** 44273	$1,150	93	Excellent	Excellent	2	1	1	•	•
✓	2	**Kenmore** 42733	640	91	Excellent	Excellent	2		2		•
✓	3	**Frigidaire** Professional FPEC3085K[S]	950	90	Very good	Excellent	1	3			•
✓	4	**GE** Café CP350STSS	1,200	90	Very good	Excellent	1	1	3		•
✓	5	**Electrolux** Icon E30EC65ESS	1,200	88	Very good	Excellent	1	2	2		•
✓	6	**LG** LCE3081ST	1,000	87	Very good	Excellent	1	1	2	•	•
✓	7	**Whirlpool** G7CE3034XP	700	86	Very good	Excellent	2		2		•
✓	8	**GE** Profile PP945BMBB	950	86	Very good	Excellent	2		2	•	•
✓	9	**Bosch** NET5054UC	900	85	Very good	Excellent	1	2	1	•	•
	B	**36-INCH ELECTRIC SMOOTHTOP**									
✓	1	**Frigidaire** Professional FPEC3685KS	1,000	90	Very good	Excellent	1	3	1		•
	C	**30-INCH ELECTRIC INDUCTION**									
✓	1	**Kenmore** 43820	1,600	99	Excellent	Excellent	3	1		•	
✓	2	**GE** Profile PHP900DMBB	1,400	99	Excellent	Excellent	2	2		•	
✓	3	**Kenmore** 43800	1,300	97	Excellent	Excellent	3	1		•	
✓	4	**Bosch** NIT5065UC	1,800	97	Excellent	Excellent	2		2	•	
✓	5	**Electrolux** Icon E30IC75FSS	2,000	97	Excellent	Excellent	3	1		•	
✓	6	**Frigidaire** Professional FPCC3085KS*	1,200	96	Excellent	Excellent	1	3			•
✓	7	**KitchenAid** KICU500XB	1,400	95	Excellent	Excellent	2	2		•	
✓	8	**Whirlpool** GCI3061XB	1,200	95	Excellent	Excellent	2		2	•	
✓	9	**LG** LCE30845	1,800	93	Excellent	Excellent	1	2	1	•	
	D	**30-INCH GAS**									
✓	1	**Bosch** NGM8054UC	1,100	79	Good	Excellent	1	2	2		•
✓	2	**Kenmore** 32353	1,200	76	Good	Excellent	2	2	1		•
✓	3	**LG** LSCG306ST	1,100	73	Fair	Fair	1	3	1		•
	E	**36-INCH GAS**									
✓	1	**Thermador** SGSX365FS	1,900	81	Very good	Excellent	3	2			•
✓	2	**GE** Monogram ZGU385NSMSS	1,400	80	Good	Excellent	3	2			•
✓	3	**GE** Profile JGP975WEKWW	1,200	80	Good	Excellent	1	2	2		•
✓	4	**GE** Café CGP650SETS	1,300	77	Good	Excellent	1	3	1		•
✓	5	**Electrolux** EW36GC55GS	1,300	75	Good	Excellent	2	2	1		•
✓	6	**LG** LCG3691ST	1,300	74	Very good	Very good	2	2	1		•
✓	7	**Bosch** NGM8654UC	1,200	70	Good	Very good	4		1		•
✓	8	**Kenmore** 32313	1,100	69	Very good	Very good	2	2	1		•

*Has radiant and induction elements.

Ratings Wall ovens

Recommended models only From 20 tested.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Test results: Baking	Test results: Broiling	Test results: Capacity	Test results: Self-cleaning	Features: Convection	Features: Covered element	Features: Temp. probe
		30-INCH ELECTRIC									
✓	1	**Whirlpool** WOS92EC0AH	$1,500	80	Very good	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	•	•	
✓	2	**Whirlpool** WOS51EC0AS	1,300	72	Very good	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent		•	
✓	3	**Bosch** HBL5450UC	1,900	72	Very good	Very good	Very good	Very good	•	•	•

E1 Thermador

1 Whirlpool

Can't find it?

We've analyzed all the ranges we've tested over the past five years. If you don't find one of our recommended models at the retailer, consider one of these brands. (Models within a brand can vary, and design or manufacture changes might affect future performance.)

For electric ranges, LG, GE, Samsung, and Kenmore have consistently performed better than average, regardless of price. Frigidaire, Whirlpool, and Maytag also performed reasonably well but not as consistently. For gas ranges, LG, Frigidaire, and GE consistently performed better than average, regardless of price. Kenmore and Whirlpool also performed reasonably well but not as consistently.

And the worst from our tests ...

Poor simmering, unimpressive baking or broiling, or small oven capacity helped put these models at the bottom of our Ratings, with overall scores of 40 or lower. Similar models, in small type, haven't been tested, but we believe they are enough alike in features, performance, and specs that the same results apply.

Ranges

KitchenAid Architect Series KGRS807S, $1,700 (30-inch gas)
American Range ARR304, $3,600 (30-inch pro-style gas)
BlueStar RNB304BSS, $3,700 (30-inch pro-style gas)
Bertazzoni A30 4GGV XE, $2,400 (30-inch pro-style gas) A30 4GGV XS

Cooktop

KitchenAid KFGS306VSS, $1,100 (30-inch gas) KFGU706VSS

FROM THE EXPERTS AT CONSUMER REPORTS

Test Your HEART SMARTS

TRUE OR FALSE:
(Check your answers below.)

	True	False
1. Everyone should have an exercise stress test for their heart.	☐	☐
2. Avocados are one of the best fruits for your heart.	☐	☐
3. A simple test on your legs can help prevent a heart attack.	☐	☐

Now It's Easy to Separate Health Fact from Fiction

1. **No, most people can do without an exercise stress test.** Experts say that it yields too many false-positive results, resulting in unnecessary treatments and anxiety.
2. **Yes, avocados can be good for your heart** because they contain certain vitamins that help reduce levels of artery-damaging homocysteine in your body.
3. And **yes,** if you have pain in your legs, **you should be tested for peripheral artery disease**—which makes you 5 to 7 times more likely than others to suffer a heart attack or stroke.

From nutrition and weight loss to prescription drugs, disease prevention, pain relief, and more — CONSUMER REPORTS ON HEALTH brings you objective facts to help you make smart decisions about your health.

Send for your RISK-FREE ISSUE and save 35% off the single-copy price!

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SC2C4D

BY THE NUMBERS **80** Models tested **1,660** Holes drilled

Cordless drills

Better batteries make tools lighter

A1 Hitachi

C2 Black & Decker

LIGHTER LITHIUM-ION cells are helping cordless drills shed some bulk. Our top picks weigh as little as 2.3 pounds and start at just $90. One top-scoring drill includes an impact driver with added torque, or twisting force, for roughly half what you'd pay if you bought both tools separately.

For the simple stuff. Drills priced under $100 make up most of the market and typically have smaller, ⅜-inch chucks. The new **C2 Black & Decker,** a CR Best Buy at $90, weighs just 3.1 pounds and offers quick charging plus two speed ranges instead of the usual one. But the brand's LDX120C, $70, proved to be relatively slow and shy on power. And its battery charger leaves charging status a mystery.

For general use. Speedy drilling and driving with lots of torque helped the new 3.5-pound **A4 DeWalt,** $220, join our winner's list. The 3.9-pound **A10 Kobalt,** $160 at Lowe's, blends comparable speed and power with 20-minute recharges and a charger that shows precisely how many minutes remain until it's done. Both of those features help make up for its relatively short run time.

If you're more serious. These contractor-grade drills trade some lightness for the extended run time you'll need for decks and other large projects. Paying $280 for the **B2 Milwaukee** buys you those extra minutes plus speed, power, and easy handling. Also consider the lighter-weight Makita LXPH05, $300, if you also want a hammer-drill mode for drilling into masonry and can live with less drilling speed and power, which kept it out of our picks.

For special jobs. Impact drivers have more torque than regular drills but are slower and louder. The **D2 Hitachi,** a CR Best Buy at $160, delivers the best blend of performance and value. Want an even better deal? The $180 **A7 Ridgid** drill comes with the brand's R86034K impact driver, which performed respectably in our tests and costs $160 by itself.

Cordless screwdrivers are ultra-small and light. The 2.1-pound **E1 Milwaukee,** $100, is light without sacrificing speed. But the **C2 Black & Decker** and **C6 Porter-Cable** drills weigh little more, cost $10 less, and are more powerful and versatile.

Ratings

Recommended models only From 80 tested.

● Excellent ◓ Very good ○ Good ◒ Fair ● Poor

☑ CR Best Buy ☑ Recommended

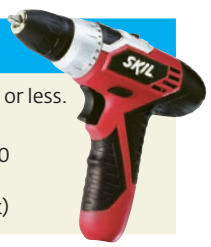
Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Specifications: Volts	Cell type [1]	Weight (lb.)	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Speed	Power	Run time	Charge time	Handling	Noise
	A	**GENERAL-USE DRILL/DRIVERS** All have ½-inch chuck size.											
☑	1	**Hitachi** DS18DSAL	$170	18	Li	3.4	78	●	●	○	●	●	○
☑	2	**Makita** LXFD01CW	200	18	Li	3.3	77	●	●	○	●	◓	○
☑	3	**Ridgid** R86008K	160	18	Li	4.0	77	●	◓	◓	●	◓	○
☑	4	**DeWalt** DCD780C2	220	20	Li	3.5	75	●	●	◒	●	◓	○
☑	5	**Panasonic** EY6432GQKW	200	15.6	NiMH	4.9	75	●	◓	●	◓	○	○
☑	6	**DeWalt** DCD760KL	220	18	Li	3.9	74	●	◓	○	●	◓	○
☑	7	**Ridgid** R9600	180	18	Li	4.0	72	●	●	◒	●	◓	◒
☑	8	**Craftsman** 17310 [2]	100	19.2	Li	3.8	72	◓	◓	○	●	◓	○
☑	9	**Bosch** DDS181-02	200	18	Li	3.4	71	●	◓	○	●	◓	◒
☑	10	**Kobalt** KT200A (Lowe's)	160	18	Li	3.9	71	●	●	◒	●	◓	○
	B	**TOUGHER-JOB DRILL/DRIVERS** All have ½-inch chuck size.											
☑	1	**Makita** BHP454 [3]	280	18	Li	5.0	84	●	●	●	●	◒	○
☑	2	**Milwaukee** 2603-22	280	18	Li	5.0	83	●	●	●	◓	◓	◒
☑	3	**DeWalt** DCD 940KX	280	18	NiCd	6.1	81	●	●	●	◓	○	○
	C	**LIGHT-USE DRILL/DRIVERS** All have ⅜-inch chuck size.											
☑	1	**Hitachi** DS14DSFL	140	14.4	Li	3.3	70	●	◓	○	●	◓	○
☑	2	**Black & Decker** LDX220SBFC [2]	90	20	Li	3.1	66	◓	◓	◒	●	●	○
☑	3	**DeWalt** DCD710S2	160	12	Li	2.5	66	◓	○	◒	●	●	○
☑	4	**Milwaukee** 2410-22	160	12	Li	2.6	63	◓	○	●	●	◓	○
☑	5	**Ridgid** R92009	140	12	Li	2.6	58	◓	○	●	●	○	○
☑	6	**Porter-Cable** PCL120DDC	90	12	Li	2.3	56	○	○	●	●	●	○
☑	7	**DeWalt** DC742KA	140	12	NiCd	3.8	55	◓	○	●	◓	◓	○
☑	8	**Skil** 2895-01	100	18	NiCd	4.7	55	◓	○	◒	○	○	○
	D	**IMPACT DRIVERS** These trade drilling speed and quietness for added twisting force.											
☑	1	**Ryobi** P236	190 [4]	18	Li	4.3	78	◓	●	●	◓	◓	●
☑	2	**Hitachi** WH18DSAL	160	18	Li	3.2	74	◓	●	◓	●	●	●
☑	3	**DeWalt** DCF885C2	220	20	Li	2.9	74	◓	●	○	●	●	●
	E	**CORDLESS SCREWDRIVER** This small, light tool is pricey for its performance.											
☑	1	**Milwaukee** 2401-22	100	12	Li	2.1	66	●	◒	◒	●	●	◓

[1] Li = lithium-ion, NiCd = nickel-cadmium, NiMH = nickel-metal-hydride. [2] Includes one battery instead of two. [3] Has hammer-drill mode. [4] Price includes battery and charger, sold separately.

Wimpiest drills from our tests

Little power and short run times earned these drills an overall score of 40 or less.

Skil 2566-02, $75
Rockwell RC2122K, $40
Skil 2240-01, $45
Craftsman 11834, $60
Skil 2466-02, $60
Skil 2260-01, $60
Ridgid R92008, $140
Craftsman 11810, $50
Skil 2414-02, $90
Ryobi HP696, $30
Skil 2364-02, $50 (shown at right)



Toyota Prius C

Cars

Road tests, auto products, hot topics

Reports

New reliability ratings 61
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Lexus GS 350 70
Nissan Altima 71

Audi A7

Cadillac CTS

Most reliable new cars

Ford continues to fall while seven Japanese brands top our list

Only two years ago, Ford was Detroit's poster child for reliability. It cracked the top 10 among brands in our predicted-reliability scores, with more than 90 percent of its models being average or better. Since then, a perfect storm of reliability problems has dropped Ford to next to last among the 28 brands in our survey. And Lincoln, Ford's luxury brand, placed just a notch higher.

Toyota, on the other hand, excelled in our latest ratings. Its three brands—Scion, Toyota, and Lexus—swept the top spots. They were followed by four other Japanese makes: Mazda, Subaru, Honda, and Acura. All of the models produced by the top seven brands had average or better reliability. And of the 90 Japanese models reflected in our brand comparison, 86 were average or better, with 35 earning the highest rating.

Those findings from our 2012 Annual Auto Survey are based on subscribers' experiences with 1.2 million vehicles. We use that extensive data to predict how well new cars that are currently on sale will hold up. (See "Predicted-Reliability Scores," on page 64.)

Several factors contributed to Ford's decline. A few new or redesigned models, including the Explorer, Fiesta, and Focus, came out of the gate with more problems than normal. Ford has also added the MyFord/MyLincoln Touch electronic infotainment system, which has been problematic so far, to many vehicles. In addition, three historically reliable models—the Ford Escape and Fusion and the Lincoln MKZ—are not included in the analysis. They were redesigned for 2013, and we don't know how the new versions will fare.

Other highlights from our survey:

HOW DID WE DO?

85%

of the 2012 models that we predicted would have average or better reliability actually do. As for our misses, we find that subscribers can give us a better idea of how reliable a model is after it has been on the market for a couple of years.

- The subcompact Toyota Prius C earned our top score, and the worst score went to the V6, four-wheel-drive Ford Explorer. Other Prius versions—the hatchback, V wagon, and new Plug-in hybrid—were also above average.
- Cadillac is the top U.S. brand, having moved up 14 spots this year. Its CTS coupe was the most reliable domestic car.
- Mazda is hot on the trail of the three Toyota brands, and its improvement is buoyed by the predicted-reliability score for the new 2013 CX-5 SUV, which was much better than average.
- Audi had its best showing ever, moving up 18 spots to eighth place, making it easily the most reliable European make, and the top non-Japanese brand.
- Nissan's Leaf, the first all-electric car in our survey, earned a top reliability score.
- Jaguar, with two models in our survey, continued to rank at the bottom.

Big three's mixed bag

Ford's bumpy road is evident in the numbers. Sixty percent of Ford-branded models and half of Lincolns were below average in predicted reliability, and none placed

Mazda CX-5

above. Only two Lincoln models, the MKS and the Navigator, reached average.

Not all of Ford's problems are shared by its domestic counterparts. The General Motors nameplates—Buick, Cadillac, Chevrolet, and GMC—moved up in ranking. Cadillac climbed the farthest, but the best news might be from Chevrolet. The Volt extended-range electric car continues to have above-average reliability, and the compact Chevrolet Cruze, dismal in its first year, improved to average.

Chrysler brands had a few setbacks. Unlike last year, we now have sufficient data for some recently revamped Chrysler and Dodge models, and their problems have dragged the nameplates' rankings down some. The Dodge Charger, for example, returns with well-below-average reliability. Other models had ups and downs. The V6 version of the Chrysler 300 sedan, with an average rating, is now the brand's most reliable model, and the V8 300 is its worst. Likewise, the V6 Jeep Grand Cherokee scores average and the V8 is now below par. The differences stem from the alternative powertrains and the extra features found in higher-priced versions.

Separating its trucks into a new nameplate, Ram, didn't help Dodge's standing. And Fiat's 500 debuted with average reliability in its first year in the U.S.

Japanese models are tops

Toyota is clearly setting the pace in reliability. Of 27 models in the brand's lineup, 16 earned the highest rating.

Subaru also improved its standing, with its redesigned Impreza debuting with top marks and none of its models scoring below average. Honda dropped one spot in the ranking, to sixth place, but its worst vehicle, the Odyssey minivan, improved from below average to average.

Nissan and its Infiniti luxury brand performed well overall, but a few models kept them from ranking with the other Japanese nameplates. Nissan's Versa sedan, redesigned for 2012, was much worse than average, as was the large Armada SUV. The Titan pickup truck was also below par. Of the seven Infiniti models, only the convertible version of the G scored below average.

Germans lead Europe

All of the German luxury brands improved. Six of the seven Audis in our survey rated average or better, as did 10 of the 12 BMWs. But the high-end BMW 7 Series and the turbocharged six-cylinder version of the X3 SUV were much worse than average. Mercedes-Benz made a good showing, with the turbocharged, four-cylinder C250 sedan doing well in its first year and the V6 E-Class sedan moving from average to

What's up, what's down

Our reliability predictions play an important role in our decision to recommend a model or not, along with our road-test results and independent safety tests.

Here we show how our recommendations have changed based on the latest reliability results. We list models that are newly or no longer recommended, based on improved or declining reliability, respectively. We also list models for which we now have sufficient data to rate and recommend or not.

Models that changed status are those that turned out better or worse than we thought they would last year.

Models with scores previously based on respondents' short exposure to them sometimes proved less reliable in their second year. Predictions based on only a single year's data are somewhat tentative, because many problems don't emerge right away, and others are addressed by the carmakers during the production run. That reinforces our advice to not buy a new or redesigned model in its first year. Models marked with an asterisk (*) indicate data based on one model year only.

Newly recommended

Models with improved reliability	Models that now have sufficient data
BMW 135i*	Audi A6 (3.0T)*
BMW 535i	BMW 328i*
BMW X5 (6-cyl., turbo)	Chevrolet Sonic*
Buick Enclave	Chrysler 300 (V6)
Buick Regal	Hyundai Accent*
Chevrolet Cruze	Hyundai Equus*
Chevrolet Silverado 1500 (V8, 4WD)	Hyundai Veloster*
Ram 1500 (V8)	Kia Rio*
GMC Acadia	Lexus GS*
GMC Sierra 1500 (V8, 4WD)	Mazda 2*
Honda Odyssey	Mazda CX-5*
Nissan 370Z*	Mercedes-Benz C250 (1.8T)*
Toyota Sienna (AWD)	Mitsubishi Outlander Sport*
Volkswagen CC	Nissan Leaf
Volkswagen Eos	Nissan Quest*
Volkswagen Jetta Sedan TDI	Toyota Camry (V6)*
	Volkswagen Passat (5-cyl.)*
	Volkswagen Passat (TDI)*

Not recommended

Models with declining reliability	Models that now have sufficient data but are below average
Chevrolet Corvette	Buick LaCrosse (4-cyl., eAssist)*
Dodge Challenger (shown)	Buick Verano*
Ford Mustang (V8)	Chrysler 300 (V8)*
Hyundai Genesis Coupe	Dodge Charger
Hyundai Sonata (turbo)	Ford Edge (4-cyl., EcoBoost)*
Infiniti G Convertible	Mercedes-Benz M-Class*
Jeep Grand Cherokee (V8)	Volkswagen Touareg
Mini Cooper Countryman	
Nissan Titan	
Volkswagen GTI	
Volvo C30*	
Volvo C70*	

New or redesigned 2012 or early 2013 models for which we have insufficient data include the BMW 6 Series and X3 (2.0T), Chevrolet Malibu, Fisker Karma, Ford Escape, Hyundai Azera, Land Rover Range Rover Evoque, Mercedes-Benz SL and SLK, Mitsubishi i-MiEV, Porsche 911 and Boxster, Scion iQ, and Toyota Yaris.

above average. But the redesigned M-Class came in below average in its first year.

Volkswagen was a mix. The redesigned Passat did well, and the CC, Eos, and diesel Jetta sedan improved. But the redesigned Beetle, four- and five-cylinder gasoline Jetta, sporty GTI, and Touareg SUV were below average. Volvo, which ranked highest among European brands last year, dropped 10 places, hurt by declining scores for the C30 hatchback and C70 convertible and a below-average showing for the aging XC90 SUV.

Green cars hold up

When the Prius came to market 12 years ago, there was plenty of skepticism about how well hybrid powertrains would hold up. But those fears were unfounded: Reliability is a high point for most hybrids. All but the relatively new Hyundai Sonata Hybrid proved reliable in this year's survey.

So far, electric vehicles have also been reliable. The Nissan Leaf had an excellent showing and was the most reliable Nissan in the lineup. The Chevrolet Volt has been above average in our past two surveys. And Toyota's new Prius Plug-in earned a top reliability score in this year's survey.

Owners helping buyers

Unlike our road-test scores, our reliability ratings do not come from our experience during vehicle testing. Instead, we rely on car owners to supply the Consumer Reports National Research Center with the data.

Earlier this year, we asked Consumer Reports and ConsumerReports.org subscribers to tell us about serious problems they've had with their vehicles in the prior 12 months. We base our predicted-reliability scores on the most recent three model years of data, provided the model has not been redesigned for 2013. The scores are presented as a percentage better or worse than the average of all cars.

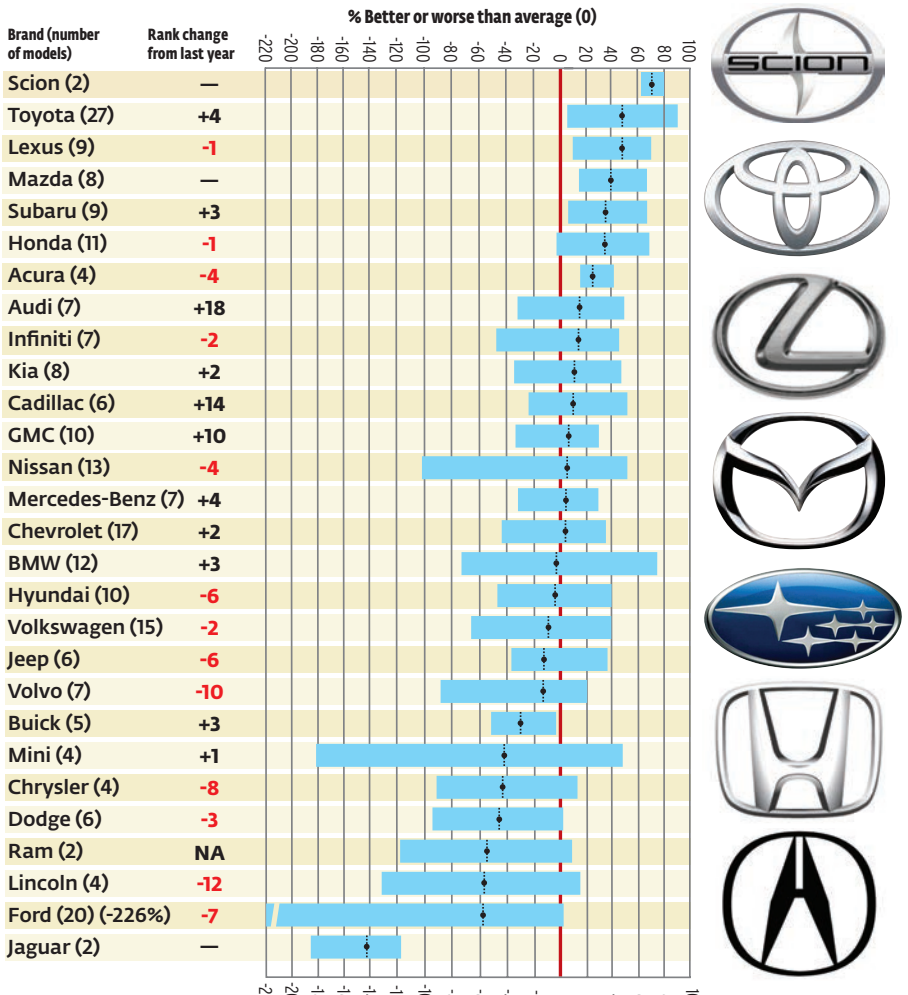
Our minimum sample size is 100 vehicles, but we often get many more. Among 2012 models, the Honda CR-V drew the most responses: 2,981. Other 2012 models with more than 2,000 responses are the Hyundai Elantra sedan and the four-cylinder Toyota Camry and Subaru Outback.

Some new and redesigned models were released too late to be in our survey, and redesigned 2013 models are not included in the brand's average reliability score. Occasionally, we make predictions for redesigned models with exceptional track records, such as the Lexus ES 350.

Chevrolet Volt

How the brands compare

This graph shows how the brands rank based on the average of their models' predicted-reliability scores. The score is calculated as a percentage better or worse than the average of all cars. Each bar shows the range between a brand's best and worst models. The rank change shows how many spots a brand rose or fell in the standings compared with last year's survey. We needed sufficient data on at least two models to include a brand. Ram (formerly Dodge trucks) was not separated out from Dodge last year. "–" indicates no change from last year.



BMW 328i

CHART TOPPERS Japanese brands took the top seven spots, with none of their models scoring below average.

Predicted-reliability scores

Fuel-efficient hatchbacks, wagons, compact sports sedans, compact pickups, and small SUVs are the most reliable vehicle types overall in our survey, and upscale cars, minivans, and luxury SUVs are among the least reliable.

These charts compare the predicted reliability for 2013 models by vehicle type. The bar represents a percentage better or worse than the average for all surveyed cars.

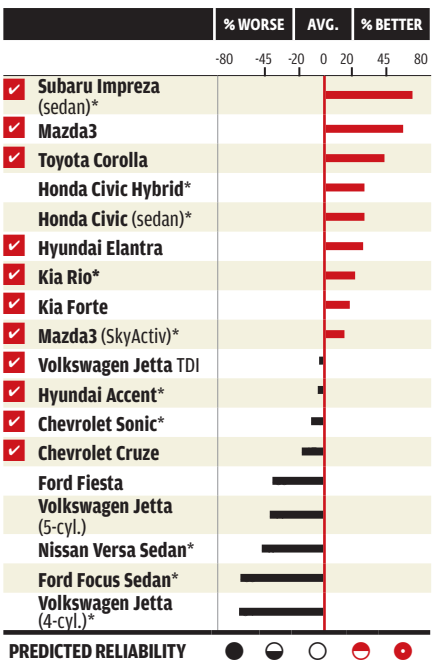
To rate each model, we calculate an overall score for each of the newest three model years, provided the model has had no major changes in that time. For each of the three model years, we compare a vehicle's overall-reliability score with the average for all vehicles of the same age. Yearly differences are combined to give the predicted reliability as a percentage better or worse than the average. The overall average is the zero line in the charts, and the average rating includes scores within 20 points of either side of the line. A broken line indicates that the score was outside the range of our chart.

If a model was new or redesigned in the past year, or if we lack sufficient data for some years, we might use data from only one model year. Those models are marked with an asterisk (*). Models with a ✔ are recommended. They have average or better reliability, did well in our testing, and performed at least adequately if included in independent crash or rollover tests.

Subaru Impreza

Nissan Leaf

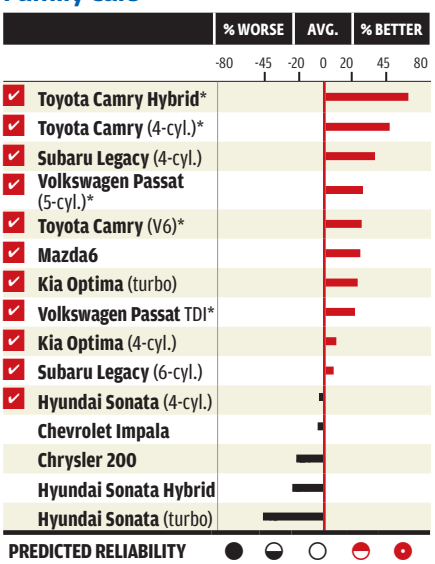
Small cars



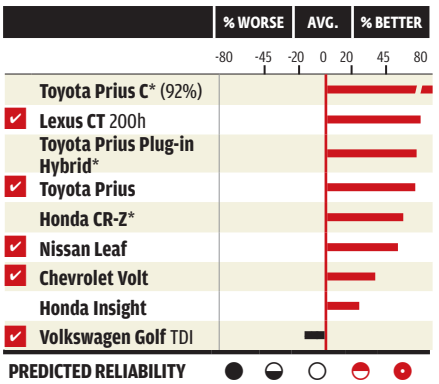
Mazda3

Toyota Camry Hybrid

Family cars

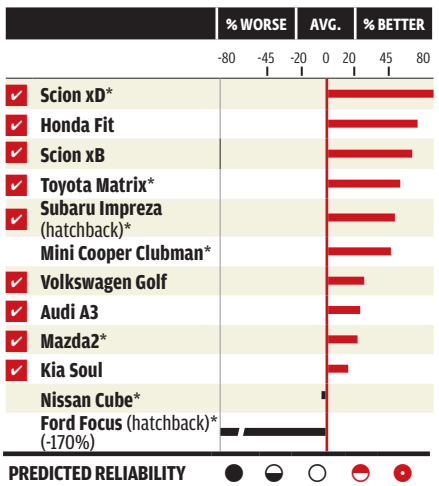


Fuel-efficient hatchbacks



Honda Fit

Small hatchbacks



Nissan 370Z

Compact sports sedans

	% WORSE	AVG.	% BETTER
✔ BMW 328i*			
✔ Lexus IS (RWD)			
✔ Infiniti G (RWD and AWD)			
Lexus IS (AWD)			
✔ Acura TSX			
✔ Cadillac CTS (V6, RWD)			
✔ Mercedes-Benz C250 (1.8T)*			
Mercedes-Benz C-Class (V6)			
✔ Audi A4 (2.0T)			
Cadillac CTS (V6, AWD)			
✔ Volvo S60*			
✔ Volkswagen CC			
✔ Buick Regal			
Buick Verano*			

-80 -45 -20 0 20 45 80

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Mercedes-Benz E-Class

Luxury cars

	% WORSE	AVG.	% BETTER
Audi A7*			
BMW 528i (2.0T)*			
✔ Lexus GS*			
✔ Mercedes-Benz E-Class (V6)			
✔ Lexus LS			
Volvo S80 (6-cyl.)*			
Lincoln MKS			
✔ Hyundai Equus*			
✔ Infiniti M			
✔ Audi A6 (3.0T)*			
BMW 550i*			
Mercedes-Benz E-Class (V8)			
✔ BMW 535i			
BMW 7 Series*			
Jaguar XJ* (-118%)			
Jaguar XF* (-164%)			

-80 -45 -20 0 20 45 80

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Sporty cars

	% WORSE	AVG.	% BETTER
✔ Nissan 370Z*			
✔ Hyundai Veloster*			
✔ Mazda MX-5 Miata			
BMW 128i*			
✔ Subaru Impreza WRX/STi			
✔ BMW 135i*			
✔ Mini Cooper			
BMW M3*			
Fiat 500*			
✔ Ford Mustang (V6)			
✔ Chevrolet Camaro			
Cadillac CTS-V*			
Volkswagen GTI			
Volvo C30*			
Hyundai Genesis Coupe			
Ford Mustang (V8)			
Audi S4*			
Dodge Challenger			
Chevrolet Corvette			
Mini Cooper S			
Volkswagen Beetle*			

-80 -45 -20 0 20 45 80

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Acura TL

Upscale cars

	% WORSE	AVG.	% BETTER
✔ Nissan Maxima			
✔ Acura TL			
✔ Chrysler 300 (V6)			
Ford Taurus			
✔ Hyundai Genesis			
Buick LaCrosse (4-cyl.)*			
Buick LaCrosse (V6)			
Ford Taurus SHO			
Chrysler 300 (V8)* (-96%)			
Dodge Charger (-96%)			

-80 -45 -20 0 20 45 80

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Lexus IS C

Coupes and convertibles

	% WORSE	AVG.	% BETTER
✔ Lexus IS C			
Cadillac CTS Coupe*			
Honda Civic Coupe*			
Infiniti G Coupe			
✔ Audi A5/S5			
✔ BMW 328 (coupe and convertible)			
✔ Volkswagen Eos			
BMW 335 (coupe and convertible)			
Mercedes-Benz E-Class (convertible)*			
Infiniti G Convertible*			
Volvo C70* (-87%)			

-80 -45 -20 0 20 45 80

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Mazda5

Wagons

	% WORSE	AVG.	% BETTER
Toyota Venza (4-cyl.)			
✔ Mazda5*			
✔ Subaru Outback (4-cyl.)			
✔ Honda Crosstour			
✔ Volkswagen Jetta SportWagen (5-cyl.)*			
✔ Toyota Prius V*			
✔ Toyota Venza (V6)			
Subaru Outback (6-cyl.)			
✔ Volvo XC70			
✔ Volkswagen Jetta SportWagen TDI			

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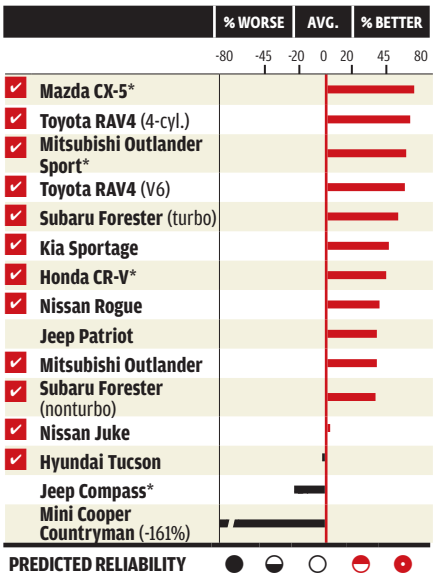
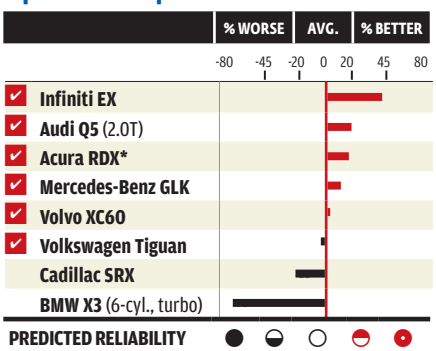
PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Small SUVs

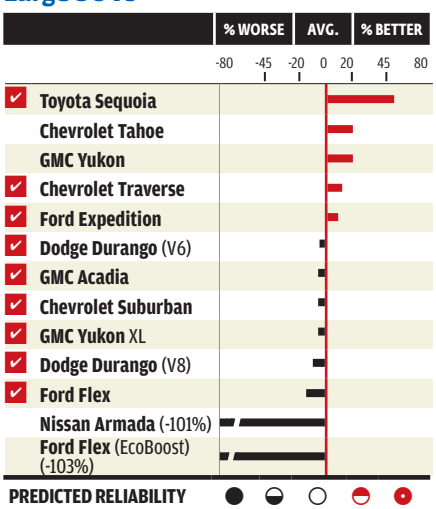


Upscale compact SUVs



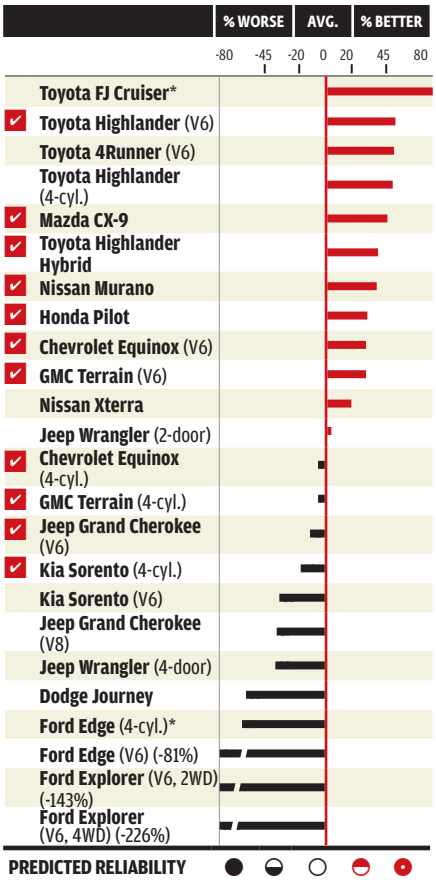
Chevrolet Traverse

Large SUVs

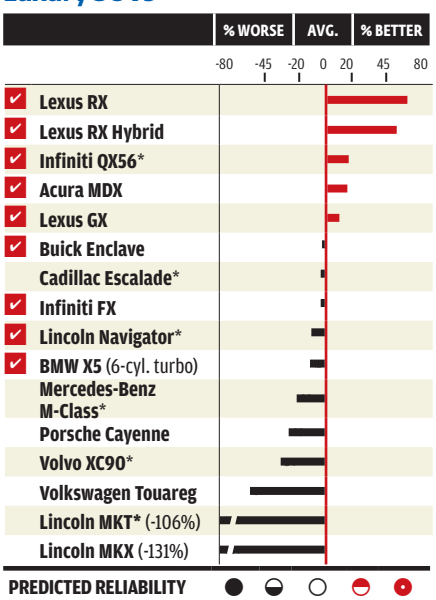


Mazda CX-9

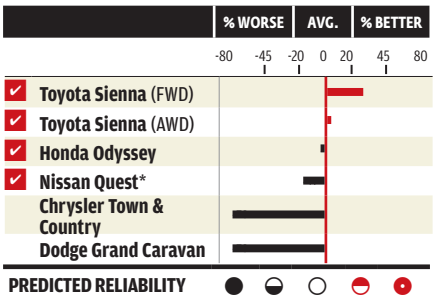
Midsized SUVs



Luxury SUVs

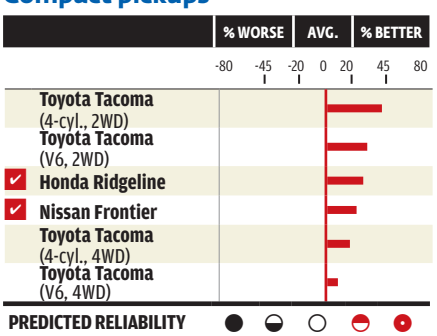


Minivans

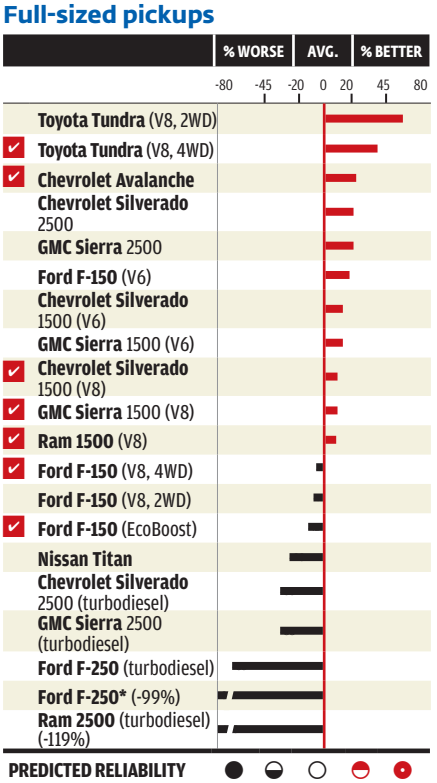


Honda Ridgeline

Compact pickups



Full-sized pickups



WAGONS

Audi Allroad vs. Subaru Outback

All-wheel-drive models that think they're SUVs

Pop quiz: You want enough cargo space for your gear and all-wheel drive for slippery conditions. So you need an SUV, right? Wrong. Several wagons fill that bill, while usually giving you better handling, ride comfort, and fuel economy than SUVs.

In fact, the new Audi Allroad and the freshened Subaru Outback are sort of "SUV-wagons." They provide rugged styling details and extra ground clearance for light off-road excursions and, yes, that tough SUV look. But we also found notable differences in the cars' driving experience and overall versatility.

This is the second go-around for the Allroad name. The original 2001 model was based on the Audi A6; the 2013 model is a smaller version that replaces the Audi A4 Avant wagon, albeit with a 1.5-inch higher ride height. Its agile handling makes it fun to drive. The cabin is quiet and beautifully finished. And a spunky 211-hp, turbocharged four-cylinder engine, matched with a slick eight-speed automatic transmission, provides decent acceleration and 22 mpg overall, which is competitive with the best small SUVs.

Leading the pack

All that helped the Allroad earn a 79 road-test score, which now tops our wagon ratings. Based on the A4, we also expect its reliability to be above average. But at $43,570, the price of our modestly equipped Allroad was about $2,000 higher than the Audi Q5 SUV, which has more rear-seat room, cargo space, and towing capacity.

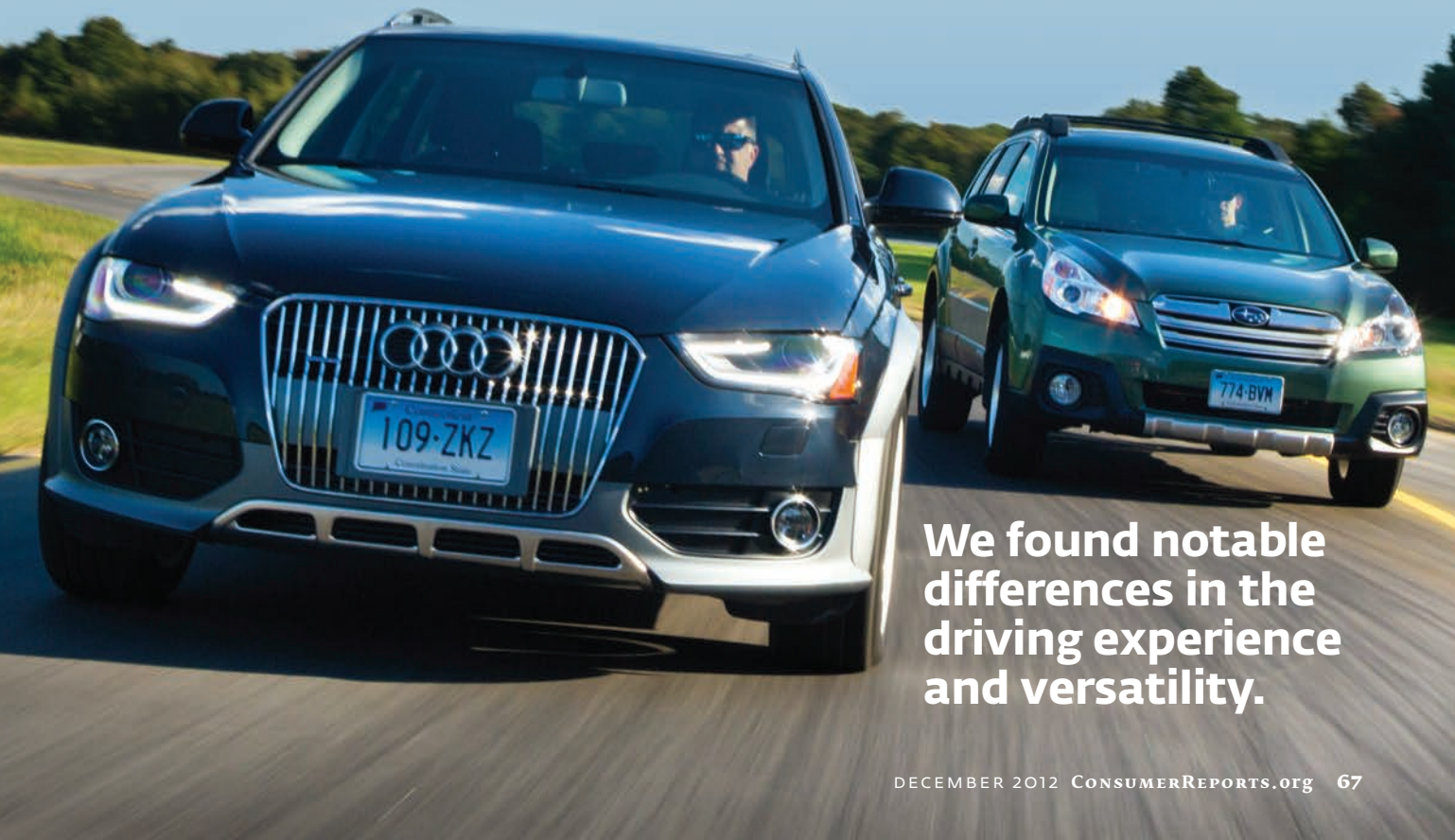
For less money, you can opt for the Subaru Outback, which is much roomier and gets better fuel economy. Changes for 2013 include a redesigned four-cylinder engine and continuously variable transmission, a revised suspension, and the availability of a new suite of safety features called EyeSight (see "A New but Pricey Safety System," on page 68).

Not all of the changes were improvements, however. Firmer suspension tuning has reduced body lean and helped tidy up the sloppy emergency handling that we criticized in the 2010 Outback. But it also spoiled the car's previously plush ride.

Fuel economy is still a class-leading 24 mpg overall. But acceleration often feels lethargic, and the coarse engine noise accentuated by the unrefined CVT becomes obtrusive at times. In addition, opting for the navigation system adds some badly designed controls.

Overall, the Outback's road-test score dropped to 73 from its previous 79.

You can buy a basic Outback for under



We found notable differences in the driving experience and versatility.

$25,000, but the price climbs steeply as features are added. Our heavily optioned Limited model rang in at a hefty $34,698. Based on our latest subscriber survey, we expect the Outback's reliability to be much better than average.

Sportiness vs. practicality

The Allroad is clearly the more engaging and comfortable car to drive. It feels sporty and tackles corners enthusiastically. At its handling limits, the Allroad displayed tenacious grip and posted a good speed while threading through our avoidance maneuver. The steering is overly light at low speeds, but it firms up nicely and delivers better feedback at higher speeds.

Complementing its sporty demeanor, the Allroad is also a quiet, rock-steady cruiser with a supple, well-controlled ride.

By contrast, the Outback isn't as nimble as some SUVs. It lumbers through turns when rushed, with delayed responses. Electronic stability control kept it secure in our avoidance maneuver, but its pronounced body lean and low cornering limits left drivers feeling harried, not confident. And artificially heavy steering communicates little feedback to the driver.

Response from the Audi's engine sometimes lags from a standing start but feels lively once the car is rolling. The Outback's redesigned 2.5-liter, horizontally-opposed four-cylinder engine added 3 horsepower. Acceleration is slightly quicker but remains just adequate. The CVT is sometimes slow to engage when shifting into gear, resulting in a disconcerting bump. At this price range, many buyers may prefer the optional 256-hp six-cylinder engine, which comes with a five-speed automatic; we expect it to deliver about 20 to 21 mpg.

Both wagons have attractive cabins, but the Audi's uses much nicer materials. Each has a comfortable driving position aided by a tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel. And they provide better visibility than most SUVs. The view out is excellent from the Outback, but a small rear window compromises the Allroad's.

Cabin space is a notable difference. The Allroad's interior is snug; the Outback's is spacious. Some testers found the Allroad's front seats to be supportive but hard. The Outback's seats are softer, but short cushions reduce thigh support. There's no comparison in the rear: The Outback's rear seat is roomy enough to fit three adults across, but even two adults barely fit in the Allroad's.

The Subaru wins on controls, sort of. Most are straightforward, though the navigation system is more cumbersome than most, and it relegates various radio functions to tiny onscreen buttons. In the Audi, even basic radio and climate controls are confounding, requiring a lot of steps using controller knobs and onscreen menus.

Bluetooth and iPod controls are standard on the Outback but optional on the Audi.

Both models have nicely finished cargo areas. The Outback's is more versatile, with a clever space underneath for stowing the cargo cover. The Audi's is much smaller but offers a power tailgate on higher trim levels and a two-position cargo net for securing luggage.

Toyota Venza

Ratings All-wheel-drive wagons

All tested models In performance order, within types.

Excellent · Very good · Good · Fair · Poor

✔ Recommended

Recommended	Rank	Make & model	Price as tested	In this issue	Overall road-test score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)	Predicted reliability	Overall mpg
✔	1	**Audi Allroad** 2.0T	$43,570	•	79	Very good	22
✔	2	**Toyota Venza** (V6)	34,209		77	Very good	20
✔	3	**Volvo XC70**	42,560		77	Very good	18
✔	4	**Honda Crosstour** EX-L (V6)	34,730		73	Very good	20
✔	5	**Subaru Outback** 2.5i Limited	34,698	•	73	Excellent	24

A new but pricey safety system

The Subaru Outback's new EyeSight system is a suite of electronic safety features of the type normally found in luxury cars.

It uses two cameras to monitor vehicles in front. It can help you prevent or minimize a rear-end collision, for example, by sounding an alert or even applying the brakes, if you're approaching a vehicle too quickly.

Studies have shown that such automatic braking systems have a significant benefit in reducing accident claims. In most cases, if the speed difference between cars is less than 20 mph, the system should prevent a collision. Above that, it may still apply the brakes in time to reduce damage.

The EyeSight system also monitors lane markings and will warn you if your car begins drifting within or out of its lane.

Adaptive cruise control is also included, which lets you maintain a set distance behind a car in front. It automatically slows your car in congestion and can even manage the throttle and brakes in stop-and-go traffic.

EyeSight works well overall, but we felt the lane-detection system was too sensitive; it can be turned off, but the overhead switch is awkward to use. We also wish EyeSight included a blind-spot detection feature.

The system doesn't come cheaply. It retails for $1,295. But it's only available on top-of-the-line Limited models as part of a $3,940 options package that also includes a moonroof and navigation system. Still, the Outback and Subaru Legacy sedan are the least expensive cars to offer such a system with autonomous braking capability.

LOOKING OUT EyeSight uses forward-facing cameras, one on each side of the rear-view mirror, to watch for cars and lane markings.

Audi Allroad

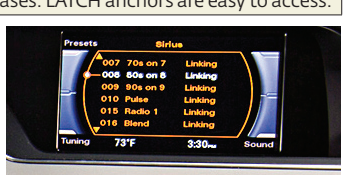
ROAD-TEST SCORE **79**

✔ Recommended

Tested vehicle	
HIGHS	Handling, fit and finish, transmission, braking
LOWS	Complicated controls, small rear seat and cargo area
TRIM LINE	Premium
DRIVETRAIN	211-hp, 2.0-liter, turbocharged four-cylinder engine; eight-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	iPod control, Bluetooth, HID headlights, heated front seats
TESTED PRICE	$43,570

More test findings	
BRAKING	Very short stops, with a firm, reassuring pedal feel.
HEADLIGHTS	Xenon lamps provide good visibility with excellent light intensity but have a sharp cutoff.
ACCESS	Easy to the front, despite a wide, tall sill. A bit snug to the rear.
VISIBILITY	Good to the front and sides. The rear window is somewhat small. A backup camera is optional, but it should be standard at this price.
CABIN STORAGE	Modest, with small compartments.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	The center-rear restraint is not tall enough to protect an adult, even when it's raised.
CHILD SEATS	Safety-belt buckles mounted forward of the seatback may make it difficult to secure some infant-seat bases. LATCH anchors are easy to access.

TRANSFORMING The cargo space is small but beautifully finished, and the rear seat folds flat.



COMPLICATED Adjusting radio or climate controls often requires performing multiple steps.

Scan for video.

Subaru Outback

ROAD-TEST SCORE **73**

✔ Recommended

Tested vehicle	
HIGHS	Roomy interior, visibility, fuel economy, EyeSight safety features
LOWS	Agility, acceleration, engine noise, complicated radio (with optional navigation)
TRIM LINE	2.5i Limited
DRIVETRAIN	173-hp, 2.5-liter, horizontally-opposed four-cylinder engine; continuously variable automatic transmission; all-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	Navigation, moonroof, rear camera, EyeSight driver assist system
TESTED PRICE	$34,698

More test findings	
BRAKING	Very good, with a firm, reassuring pedal feel.
HEADLIGHTS	Good low and high beams.
ACCESS	Large openings make it easy, despite tall, wide door sills that require a somewhat high step in.
VISIBILITY	Large windows and thin roof pillars make it easy to see out. A backup camera is optional.
CABIN STORAGE	Moderate.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	The center-rear restraint is not tall enough to protect an adult, even when it's raised.
CHILD SEATS	Owner's manual warns against installing in center-rear, the safest position. Some infant bases may be hard to secure in outboard positions with the safety belt, but LATCH installation is likely to be secure.

LOUNGING The rear seat has more room than in many SUVs, even for three people.

CHALLENGING The radio's touch screen has small, hard-to-read buttons.

Scan for video.

NOT CLICKING We found the mouse-like controller for some cabin functions to be complicated.

Lexus GS 350

✔ Recommended

ROAD-TEST SCORE **84**

Redesigned for 2012, the GS luxury sedan is notably improved inside and out. Those upgrades helped boost its overall road-test score to 84, up significantly from the 75 of its 2006 GS 300 predecessor. The GS 350 now goes head to head with the Mercedes-Benz E350 and BMW 535i, but it still trails the best-in-class Audi A6 and Infiniti M37.

The difference is easily felt from the driver's seat. The ride is supple and controlled, handling is responsive, and the 306-hp, 3.5-liter V6 engine delivers quick acceleration and plenty of power for passing and merging. We measured 21 mpg overall, which is very competitive for this class. One blemish: In contrast to the silky-smooth engines we've come to expect from Lexus, this V6 has a raspy edge when it's revved. It's supposed to sound sporty, but it just sounds gruff.

Inside, occupants will find a quiet, nicely finished cabin. The driver has plenty of room, unlike in the cramped cockpit of the previous GS. Our biggest complaint with the interior is that it's marred by a newfangled control system that relies on a giant video display and mouse-like controller that's distracting and complex.

Reliability is above average based on our latest subscriber survey.

How they compare

Rec.	MIDSIZED LUXURY SEDANS	0 P | F | G | VG | E 100
✔	**Audi A6** 3.0 Premium Plus Quattro	93
✔	**Infiniti M37**	93
✔	**Mercedes-Benz E350**	86
✔	**Lexus GS 350**	84
✔	**BMW 535i**	81

Poise and grit

The GS sails placidly over road flaws, and handling is just a notch behind its German competitors. It's steady and surefooted in corners. Steering feels quick and well weighted, but it can be a bit vague on center. Still, the GS feels engaging to drive, on the road and on the track. When pushed to its handling limits at our test track, the GS instilled confidence in our drivers and threaded our avoidance maneuver at a commendable speed.

A small 37-foot turning circle helps with parking. And an optional $500 radar-guided park-assist system lets the car parallel park itself. It works well but requires patience.

The V6 is mated to a smooth and responsive six-speed automatic transmission. Most competitors have more speeds, which aids in their efficiency. There are sport, eco, and snow modes that alter steering and throttle response. All-wheel drive is an option. A hybrid version, the GS 450h, is also available and pairs the V6 with an electric motor for a combined 338 hp. That drivetrain is offered as an alternative to an optional V8. Like most luxury sedans, the GS takes premium gas.

Inside you'll find rich materials and impressive fit and finish. A power tilt-and-telescopic steering wheel has generous adjustment, and optional 18-way adjustable seats help drivers dial in a customized fit. The rear is comfortable for two people, but the center position is narrow, making things tight for three.

Gauges are brightly lit and simple, and an optional $900 heads-up display projects the vehicle speed onto the lower windshield. The giant center screen is also clear, with large fonts. The Lexus Enform infotainment system lets you control some smart-phone apps onscreen. And voice commands can be used for many common functions. Otherwise, it can be hard to navigate through the plethora of onscreen buttons with the controller, which we found to be complicated and fussy to use.

The GS's trunk is spacious, but the rear seatbacks don't fold down to increase cargo space. There's only a small center pass-through for longer objects.

Tested vehicle

HIGHS	Quietness, ride, powertrain, front-seat comfort, fit and finish, visibility
LOWS	Fussy controls
TRIM LINE	350
DRIVETRAIN	306-hp, 3.5-liter V6; six-speed automatic transmission; rear-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	Navigation with split display, heads-up display, 18-inch alloy wheels, 18-way power front seats, stereo upgrade, blind-spot monitor, park assist
TESTED PRICE	$58,858

The GS line

OTHER TRIMS	350F, 450h
OTHER ENGINES & DRIVETRAINS	338-hp, 3.5-liter V6 hybrid; continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive
BASE PRICES	$46,900-$58,950

More test findings

BRAKING	Very good overall.
HEADLIGHTS	Bi-xenons perform well, but low beams have a sharp upper cutoff. Headlights swivel to illuminate curves, a distracting motion.
ACCESS	Easy to the front, despite a wide sill. The steering wheel and driver's seat can power out of the way for easier access. Rear access is slightly harder.
VISIBILITY	Thin roof pillars and plenty of glass aid the forward view. The rear view is slightly impeded. Large mirrors, a rear camera, and a blind-spot detection system help.
CABIN STORAGE	Moderate.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	The center-rear restraint is too low for an adult, even when it's raised.
CHILD SEATS	It may be tough to secure a child seat in the center-rear. Lower LATCH anchors are easy to access, and there are three top-tether anchors.

Scan for video.

Nissan Altima

✔ Recommended

ROAD-TEST SCORE **84** 3.5 SL

ROAD-TEST SCORE **81** 2.5 S

The previous Nissan Altima topped our family-sedan ratings for several years, earning a Top Pick designation in 2010 and 2011. So expectations were high for the redesigned 2013 model.

Now, having finished our testing, we've found that the new Altima is still an excellent, top-tier family sedan, with impressive fuel economy and a roomy interior. But it no longer leads this competitive class, scoring below the Toyota Camry and Hyundai Sonata.

The Altima has plenty of virtues. The cabin is quiet, visibility is very good, and controls are intuitive. Rear-seat room has improved. And Nissan's continuously variable transmission is one of the best.

But if you want a car that's engaging to drive, look elsewhere. Compared with the previous-generation Altima, the new model took a step back in handling and braking, which are so-so compared with those of other family sedans. The suspension isn't particularly absorbent, which compromises ride comfort, especially on uplevel versions. And our mid-level 2.5 S lacks such commonly found amenities as a driver's seat lumbar support, satellite radio, and a USB port for plugging in portable music.

We tested two versions of the Altima. The high-selling 2.5 S, with a 182-hp, 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine, cost us $23,410. The top-trim 3.5 SL, with a 270-hp, 3.5-liter V6 engine, cost $31,610.

The Altima's reliability is expected to be above average, based on the previous model.

How they compare

Rec.	SIMILAR MIDSIZED SEDANS	0 P | F | G | VG | E 100
✔	**Toyota Camry** XLE (V6)	92
✔	**Hyundai Sonata** GLS (2.4)	89
	Hyundai Sonata Limited (2.0T)	89
✔	**Toyota Camry** LE (4-cyl.)	88
✔	**Nissan Altima** 3.5 SL	84
	Volkswagen Passat SEL Premium (V6)	82
✔	**Nissan Altima** 2.5 S	81
✔	**Volkswagen Passat** SE (2.5)	76

Driving for efficiency

The four-cylinder engine provides ample power and delivers an amazing 44 mpg on the highway and 31 mpg overall, the best of any non-hybrid or diesel family sedan we've tested. The smooth V6 provides potent acceleration, and it's more refined and responsive than the turbocharged four-cylinders used in competitive sedans, while delivering similar fuel economy: 24 mpg overall. But in the end, the Altima's four-cylinder works so well that we see little reason to opt for the V6.

Credit for the impressive fuel economy and performance goes partly to the smooth CVT. Under heavy acceleration, it mostly avoids the common CVT complaint of holding the engine revs too high, which can create a lot of racket. And when cruising, it keeps engine revs very low. That significantly aids fuel economy but does generate some low moaning from both engines.

Lackluster handling, vague steering, and body lean rob any fun from the 2.5 S. The 3.5 SL is more capable and responsive but still isn't sporty. When pushed to their handling limits at our track, both were secure through our avoidance maneuver.

The V6 model's 41-foot turning circle, wide for this class, hinders maneuverability.

Altima versions with the 16-inch wheels and tires, such as our S, provide better ride

Tested vehicle	
HIGHS	Fuel economy, interior room, controls, transmission, V6 acceleration
LOWS	2.5 S: agility, front-seat lumbar support, no USB port. 3.5 SL: agility, ride.
TRIM LINES	2.5 S, 3.5 SL
DRIVETRAINS	182-hp, 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine (2.5 S); 270-hp, 3.5-liter V6 (3.5 SL); continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive
MAJOR OPTIONS	None
TESTED PRICES	$23,410 (2.5 S), $31,610 (3.5 SL)

The Altima line	
OTHER TRIMS	2.5, 2.5 SV, 2.5 SL, 3.5 S, 3.5 SV
BASE PRICES	$21,500–$30,080

More test findings	
BRAKING	Relatively long for the 2.5 S; shorter for the 3.5 SL.
HEADLIGHTS	Halogens in the 2.5 S and xenons in the 3.5 SL deliver good visibility. Xenons have better intensity and width.
ACCESS	Fairly easy front and rear.
VISIBILITY	Very good with large windows and thin pillars. High rear deck. Camera and blind-spot monitoring available on upper trims.
CABIN STORAGE	Large console and glove box.
HEAD RESTRAINTS	The rear-center restraint is not tall enough to protect an adult in a rear collision.
CHILD SEATS	LATCH anchors in the rear outboard seats are hard to access. Integrated head restraint makes it hard to tighten the top tether.

Scan for video.

comfort. In uplevel models with low-profile tires, like our SL, you feel more pronounced rubbery punches. But sharp bumps can transmit through regardless of the version.

The Altima is quiet inside, with well-contained road and wind noise. Slightly more road hiss is transmitted by the SL's bigger tires. Overall the V6 sounds more relaxed and refined than the four.

Accommodating cabins

Padding on the doors and dashboard highlights a neat but plain interior. The leather seats and carbon-fiber-inspired trim in our SL provides a more upscale feel.

Drivers will find plenty of room overall, but the wide console intrudes on knee room a bit. A tilt-and-telescopic steering wheel, well-designed footrest, and center armrest all help with driver comfort.

The front seats are wide and well padded, but some drivers found that the cloth seats in our 2.5 S lacked sufficient support for long trips. You also can't move around easily on the grippy cloth, which proves awkward. Adjustable lumbar is available only with leather, and we found that lower-back support came up short without it. The leather seats are more supportive all around. The rear seat offers good room and support but is tight for three occupants.

The large, backlit displays are easy to read, and controls are simple, with climate and audio functions operated through easy-to-use knobs. Even the uplevel radios have tuning knobs. On lower-trim models, pairing a phone with the standard Bluetooth is easily done by voice, the only method. The SL has a USB port and a button for controlling an iPhone or iPod.

Trunk space is decent, although components for the audio system in our 3.5 SL rob some space under the rear deck. The rear seatbacks fold 60/40 to create more cargo room.

INFORMATION CENTER The colorful computer display packs a lot of content onscreen and is easy to use.

Compare

VERSION	Audi Allroad	Subaru Outback	Lexus GS	Nissan Altima	Nissan Altima
	✔ Recommended	✔ Recommended	✔ Recommended	✔ Recommended	✔ Recommended
TRIM LINE	**2.0T**	**2.5i Limited**	**350**	**3.5 SL**	**2.5 S**
PRICE: BASE/TESTED [1]	$39,600/$43,570	$29,395/$34,698	$46,900/$58,858	$30,080/$31,610	$22,500/$23,410
DRIVETRAIN					
Engine	2.0-liter 4-cyl. (211 hp) turbo	2.5-liter 4-cyl. (173 hp)	3.5-liter V6 (306 hp)	3.5-liter V6 (270 hp)	2.5-liter 4-cyl. (182 hp)
Transmission	8-speed automatic	CVT	6-speed automatic	CVT	CVT
Drive wheels	AWD	AWD	Rear	Front	Front
TIRES TESTED Model & size	Pirelli Cinturato P7, size 245/45R18 100H	Continental ContiProContact, size P225/60R17 98T	Dunlop SP Sport 5100, size P235/45R18 94V	Dunlop Sport 7000A/S, size P235/45R18 94V	Continental ContiProContact, size P215/60R16 94T
RATINGS					
PERFORMANCE					
Acceleration	◓	○	●	●	◓
0 to 60 mph, sec.	8.1	10.3	6.2	6.3	8.2
45 to 65 mph, sec.	5.1	6.6	3.8	4.2	5.6
Quarter-mile, sec.	16.3	17.9	14.7	14.7	16.4
Transmission	●	◓	●	●	●
Routine handling	◓	○	◓	○	○
Emergency handling	◓	○	◓	○	○
Avoid. maneuver, speed, mph	53.0	50.0	53.5	52.0	51.5
Braking	●	◓	◓	◓	◓
From 60 mph, dry/wet, ft.	131/136	137/150	137/147	133/141	140/152
Headlights	○	○	○	○	○
COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE					
Ride	◓	◓	◓	○	◓
Noise	◓	◓	◓	◓	◓
Driving position	◓	◓	◓	◓	◓
Front-seat comfort	◓	◓	●	◓	◓
Rear-seat comfort	◒	◓	◓	◓	◓
Access	○	◓	◓	◓	◓
Controls and displays	○	◓	○	●	●
Interior fit and finish	●	◓	●	◓	○
Cargo area/Trunk	◒	○	○	○	◓
PREDICTED RELIABILITY	◓	●	◓	◓	◓
FUEL					
Overall mpg	22	24	21	24	31
City/highway mpg	15/33	17/32	13/32	16/35	21/44
Type	premium	regular	premium	regular	regular
Capacity, gal./Cruising range, mi.	16.1/360	18.5/450	17.5/365	18.0/440	18.0/560
Annual cost, 12K mi. at $3.80/gal.	$2,135 @$4.00/gal.	$1,870	$2,290 @$4.00/gal.	$1,865	$1,470
SAFETY					
CRASH TESTS					
IIHS frontal offset	NA	Good	Good	NA	NA
IIHS side	NA	Good	Good	NA	NA
IIHS rear	NA	Good	Good	NA	NA
IIHS roof strength	NA	Good	Good	NA	NA
NHTSA front, driver/pass.	NA/NA	NA/NA	NA/NA	●/◓	●/◓
NHTSA side, driver/rear	◓/●	NA/NA	NA/NA	◓/●	◓/●
NHTSA rollover 2WD/4WD	NA/NA	NA/◓	NA/NA	◓/NA	◓/NA
AIR BAGS					
Side, front/rear	std./opt.	std./no	std./std.	std./no	std./no
Head protection	standard	standard	standard	standard	standard
SPECIFICATIONS					
DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT					
Length/width/height, in.	186/71/58	189/72/64	191/72/57	192/72/58	192/72/58
Wheelbase, in.	110	108	112	109	109
Turning circle, ft.	39	39	37	41	40
Ground clearance, in.	5.5	8.0	4.5	4.5	4.5
Curb weight, lb. (% front/rear)	3,875 (53/47)	3,580 (56/44)	3,845 (52/48)	3,385 (61/39)	3,130 (60/40)
Maximum load, lb.	1,125	900	825	900	900
Cargo volume, cu. ft./Luggage, suitcases+duffels	28.5	36.5	3+1	3+1	3+2
Towing capacity, lb.	1,100	2,700	NR	NR	NR
INTERIOR ROOM					
Front shoulder room, in.	55.0	56.0	56.5	56.0	56.0
Front leg room, in.	42.0	39.5	43.0	42.0	42.0
Front head room, in. [2]	3.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	5.5
Rear-row shoulder room, in.	54.0	55.0	55.0	54.5	54.5
Rear-row leg room, in.	26.0	29.0	28.0	29.0	29.0
Rear-row head room, in. [2]	3.0	6.0	2.5	2.0	2.0

[1] Based on sticker price at time of purchase. [2] Above a person 5'9" tall.

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Don't fall out of bed, honey

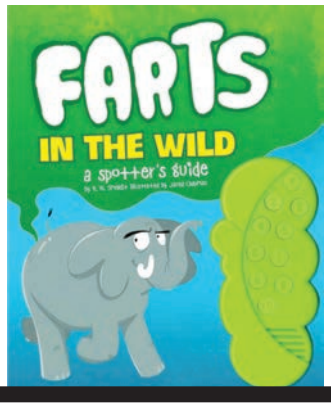
The website for a Canadian hotel shows this image and describes "incredible, breathtaking views over ... Niagara Falls." Incredible, yes. "To have the view shown in the picture," a reader points out, "one would have to be in a helicopter over the Niagara River."

Open wide

"50% Smaller," says the package of "easy-to-swallow" Alaskan Omega-3 Mini Softgels. And there's a helpful image that shows just how small the pill is, right? Wrong.

So you say

Check out the note on this squeaking "soft and cuddly plush toy" for pets. "Did the toy makers expect dogs to wear the toy?" asks the owner of disobedient Rebel, at right.



The F word

Strange products come and go, but this book with audio takes some kind of prize. The sounds in question, an ad says, range from "bubble-popping" (goldfish) to "earth-shaking" (elephants).

Passwords! All in one place!

To quote a reader perplexed by a product she saw at Bed Bath & Beyond: "Apparently the safest place to store your passwords is in a logbook" with sections for writing down websites you've visited. "Instead of, you know, bookmarking them," the reader notes.

(Do)nuts to you

By making you go to Starbucks?

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How to use the Canada Extra section

Every month, Canada Extra provides Canadian pricing and availability information about products tested for that issue. The Ratings in this section are based on this month's reports, but they narrow your choices to the products that are sold in Canada.

You can use this section in either of two ways: Start with the main report, read about the products that interest you, and turn to this section to find whether they're sold—and for what price—in Canada. Or start here, find products sold in Canada whose price and overall score appear promising, and read more about them in the main report and full Ratings chart; page numbers appear with each Canadian report. (For some products, the Canadian model designation differs slightly from the one used in the U.S.)

In most cases, the prices we list here are the approximate retail in Canadian dollars; manufacturers' list prices are indicated by an asterisk (*). Check marks identify CR Best Buys or Recommended products in the U.S. Ratings. "NA" in a chart means that information wasn't available from the manufacturer. We include, in the Contact Info list on page 38D, the manufacturer's phone number and Web address in Canada, so that you can call or go online to get information on a model you can't find in the stores. (Many products that aren't available in Canadian stores can be bought online.)

We appreciate your support but we don't take it for granted. Please write to *CanadaExtra@cu.consumer.org* and tell us what you think. We can't reply to every e-mail message or implement every suggestion, but with your help we'll try to keep growing to serve your needs.

Paul Reynolds, *Canada Extra editor*

✔ **CR Best Buy** Products with this icon offer the best combination of performance and price. All are recommended.

✔ **Recommended** Models with this designation perform well and stand out for reasons we note.

E-book readers

Report, page 30; Ratings, page 31

Recommended models only, from 25 tested.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)
✔	1	**Barnes & Noble** Nook Simple Touch with GlowLight	$140	83
✔	2	**Barnes & Noble** Nook Simple Touch	100	82
✔	3	**Amazon** Kindle Paperwhite 3G with Special Offers	180	82
✔	4	**Amazon** Kindle Paperwhite with Special Offers	120	81
✔	5	**Amazon** Kindle Keyboard 3G with Special Offers	140	79
✔	6	**Barnes & Noble** Nook Color	$150	77
✔	7	**Kobo** eReader Touch Edition	100	75
✔	8	**Amazon** Kindle with Special Offers	70	74
✔	9	**Sony** Reader PRS-T2	140	74
✔	10	**Kobo** Vox eReader	170	66

TVs

Report, page 37; Ratings, pages 38-39

Recommended models only, from 116 tested.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Type	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)
		A 60-INCH AND LARGER MODELS All have 1080p resolution.			
✔	2	**Samsung** PN60E550	plasma	$1,800	78
✔	3	**Panasonic** Viera TC-P60GT50	plasma	2,800	77
✔	6	**Samsung** PN64E550	plasma	2,400	71
✔	7	**LG** 60PM6700	plasma	1,600	70
✔	9	**LG** 60PA6500	plasma	1,130	67
✔	11	**Samsung** UN60ES6100	LCD	2,000	65
		B 55- TO 59-INCH MODELS All have 1080p resolution.			
✔	1	**Panasonic** Viera TC-P55VT50	plasma	3,000	79
✔	2	**Panasonic** Viera TC-P55ST50	plasma	1,800	78
✔	4	**Samsung** UN55ES8000	LCD	3,000	74
✔	6	**Sony** Bravia KDL-55HX850	LCD	2,800	72
✔	7	**Samsung** UN55ES6500	LCD	1,700	72
✔	8	**LG** 55LM6700	LCD	1,900	71
✔	11	**Samsung** UN55EH6000	LCD	1,350	66
✔	12	**Sony** Bravia KDL-55EX640	LCD	1,500	66
		C 46- TO 51-INCH MODELS All have 1080p resolution.			
✔	2	**Panasonic** Viera TC-P50ST50	plasma	1,400	76
✔	4	**Samsung** PN51E550	plasma	1,250	74
		C 46- TO 51-INCH MODELS continued			
✔	5	**LG** 47LM8600	LCD	$2,300	74
✔	8	**Samsung** UN46ES6500	LCD	1,450	72
✔	9	**Panasonic** Viera TC-L47ET5	LCD	1,100	72
✔	12	**Sony** Bravia KDL-46HX750	LCD	1,550	69
✔	14	**LG** 50PA6500	plasma	750	69
✔	15	**Samsung** UN46EH5300	LCD	1,050	68
✔	16	**Samsung** PN51E530	plasma	900	68
✔	18	**LG** 50PA5500	plasma	550	67
✔	19	**LG** 47LS5700	LCD	1,000	66
✔	20	**Panasonic** Viera TC-P50U50	plasma	800	66
✔	21	**Samsung** UN46EH5000	LCD	850	65
		D 40- TO 43-INCH MODELS D2, D5, and D8 have 1080p resolution; D4 has 720p.			
✔	2	**Samsung** UN40ES6580	LCD	1,450	72
✔	4	**Samsung** PN43E450	plasma	500	68
✔	5	**Samsung** UN40EH6000	LCD	750	67
✔	8	**Sony** Bravia KDL-40EX640	LCD	1,000	65
		E 32-INCH MODEL Has 720p resolution.			
✔	1	**Samsung** UN32EH4000	LCD	450	66

① U=unlimited, W=wide, M=moderate, N=narrow ② A=Amazon, B=Blockbuster, C=CinemaNow, H=Hulu Plus, N=Netflix, V=Vudu. ③ With optional adapter.

Headphones

Report, page 36

All listed models are recommended.

Brand & model	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)
STANDARD PORTABLE		
Bowers & Wilkins P5	$520	80
Klipsch Image X10i	320	80
Klipsch Image S4i	80	76
Monster Diddy Beats	130	76
Nixon Micro Blaster	110	76
ClarityOne EB110	120	71
JVC HA-FX300	90	71
Bose IE2	120	66
Bose MIE2	150	66
Bose MIE2i	150	66
Bose OE2	160	66
Monster Turbine	240	66
Phiaton PS 210	130	66
Sennheiser CX 215	70	66
Sennheiser CX 300-II Precision	100	66
STANDARD PORTABLE continued		
Skullcandy Full Metal Jacket	$ 60	66
Velodyne vPulse	170	65
STANDARD HOME/STUDIO		
Shure SRH1440	550	81
Audio-Technica ATH-WS70 Solid Bass	200	76
Bose AE2	150	76
Bose AE2i	300	76
Skullcandy Roc Nation Aviator	190	71
STANDARD WIRELESS HOME/STUDIO		
Sennheiser RS 180	340	80
NOISE-CANCELING HOME/STUDIO		
Sony MDR-NC500D	300	78
Bose QuietComfort 15	350	74
Monster beats by dr. dre	350	71

Tablets

Report, page 27; Ratings, page 29

Recommended models only, from 55 tested.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)
	A	**9- TO 10-INCH SCREEN, 4G PLUS WI-FI** Best if you want a large display, but you pay more for cellular access.		
✔	1	**Apple** iPad (Wi-Fi, 4G, 16GB) (3rd gen.)	$650	85
✔	2	**Apple** iPad 2 (Wi-Fi, 3G, 16GB)	550	81
	B	**9- TO 10-INCH SCREEN, WI-FI-ONLY** Best if you want to save money on a large display and need only Wi-Fi access.		
✔	1	**Apple** iPad (Wi-Fi, 16GB) (3rd gen.)	520	83
✔	2	**Samsung** Galaxy Note 10.1 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	500	83
✔	3	**Asus** Eee Pad Transformer Prime TF201 (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	500	82
✔	4	**Asus** Transformer Pad Infinity TF700T (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	500	82
✔	5	**Samsung** Galaxy Tab 2 (10.1) (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	350	81
✔	6	**Acer** Iconia Tab A700 (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	450	80
✔	7	**Asus** Transformer Pad TF300T (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	350	80
✔	9	**Toshiba** Excite 10 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	400	79
✔	11	**Apple** iPad 2 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	420	78
✔	15	**Asus** Eee Pad Transformer (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	400	76
	C	**7- TO 8-INCH SCREEN, 4G PLUS WI-FI** Best for portability, but you pay more for cellular access.		
✔	6	**Samsung** Galaxy Tab 2 (7.0) (Wi-Fi, 4G, 8GB)	$250	74
	D	**7- TO 8-INCH SCREEN, WI-FI-ONLY** Best for portability, and you save money with Wi-Fi-only access.		
✔	1	**Toshiba** Excite 7.7 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	450	80
✔	2	**Google** Nexus 7 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)	260	77
✔	5	**Samsung** Galaxy Tab 2 (7.0) (Wi-Fi, 8GB)	250	73
✔	7	**BlackBerry** PlayBook (Wi-Fi, 32GB)	250	70

[1] Amazon models' price includes optional $10 charger.

Printers

Report, page 44; Ratings, pages 44-46

Nineteen of the tested all-in-one inkjet and all-in-one black-and-white laser printers are available. All are recommended models.

Rec.	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score (0–100; P | F | G | VG | E)
	A	**ALL-IN-ONE INKJETS** Best if you need to print photos and documents in color as well as copy or scan.		
✔	1	**Canon** Pixma MG8220	$350	72
✔	2	**Lexmark** OfficeEdge Pro 4000c	260	72
✔	3	**Canon** Pixma MG6120	140	72
✔	4	**Lexmark** Pro 915	100	72
✔	5	**HP** Photosmart 7510	140	71
✔	6	**HP** Officejet Pro 8600 Plus	260	71
✔	7	**Brother** MFC-J825DW	110	70
✔	8	**Brother** MFC-J6910DW	320	70
✔	9	**Lexmark** Pro 715	150	70
✔	11	**Canon** Pixma MG6220	290	70
✔	13	**HP** Photosmart 5510	100	70
✔	14	**Canon** Pixma MX892	200	70
✔	15	**Canon** Pixma MX512	90	70
	C	**ALL-IN-ONE BLACK-AND-WHITE LASERS** Best if you need to print and copy in black-and-white.		
✔	1	**Samsung** SCX-3405FW	$200	76
✔	5	**Brother** MFC-7360N	190	74
✔	6	**HP** LaserJet Pro M1212nf	170	74
✔	7	**Brother** MFC-7460DN	170	74
✔	8	**HP** LaserJet Pro M1217nfw	250	73
✔	10	**Brother** MFC-7860DW	210	72

Autos Report and Ratings, pages 67-72

All of the tested vehicles are available in Canada.

Make & model	Price range	Acceleration (sec.)				Fuel economy (liters per 100 km)		
		0-50 km/h	0-100 km/h	80-100 km/h	500 meters	City driving	Highway driving	Overall
WAGONS (All-wheel drive)								
Audi A4 Allroad	$45,100-$51,900	3.3	8.5	3.6	18.6	16.1	7.1	10.5
Subaru Outback	28,495-39,995	4.2	10.8	4.6	20.5	13.5	7.3	9.7
LUXURY SEDAN								
Lexus GS	51,900-64,650	2.7	6.5	2.8	16.9	17.5	7.4	11.2
FAMILY SEDANS								
Nissan Altima (V6)	29,698-32,598	3.0	6.7	3.2	16.8	14.4	6.8	9.6
Nissan Altima (4-cyl.)	23,698-29,598	3.4	8.7	4.2	18.8	11.3	5.4	7.6

Contact info How to reach manufacturers in Canada.

Acer
800-565-2237
acer.ca

Amazon
877-586-3230
amazon.ca

Apple
800-692-7753
apple.com/ca

Asus
888-678-3698
ca.asus.com

Audio-Technica
330-686-2600
audio-technica.com

Barnes & Noble
201-559-3882
barnesandnoble.com

BlackBerry
ca.blackberry.com

Bose
800-465-2673
bose.ca

Bowers & Wilkins
978-664-2870
bowers-wilkins.com

Brother
877-276-8437
brother.ca

Canon
canon.ca

ClarityOne
clarityoneaudio.com

HP
800-289-6947
hp.com

JVC
800-668-8776
jvc.ca

Klipsch
888-250-8561
klipsch.com

Kobo
800-368-5390
kobo.com

Lexmark
800-539-6275
lexmark.ca

LG
888-542-2623
lg.com/ca

Monster
monstercable.com

Nixon
888-455-9200
nixon.com

Panasonic
866-330-0014
panasonic.ca

Phiaton
866-313-3203
phiaton.com

Samsung
800-726-7864
samsung.ca

Sennheiser
514-426-3013
sennheiser.ca

Shure
888-856-1919
shurecanada.com

Skullcandy
800-268-1172
skullcandy.com

Sony
888-289-7669
store.sony.ca

Toshiba
800-867-4422
toshiba.ca

Velodyne
905-791-2020
velodyne.com